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Immaterial and Material Discourse

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IMMATERIAL AND MATERIAL DISCOURSE

Guest Editor: Ikea M. Johnson

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Introduction

IKEA M. JOHNSON

It is an old notion to contemplate the immaterial essence of the mind. To evaluate how the matrixial realms of (sub)consciousness contribute to meta-legality, time, space, and being is a topic of momentous concern. Looking into the development of the arts, humanities, and the places they hold in socio-political formations gives way to better understand the power of comparative literature and aesthetics. George Berkeley is often considered a great innovator of immaterial discourse. Though it is not needed to dig up his discourse to build momentum for this special issue, it proves wise to consider his work as it is throughout this essay collection. Berkeley is best known for his early works on vision like *An Essay towards a New Theory of Vision* (1709) and metaphysics in *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710); and, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713). Berkeley furthermore asserted that the root of all intellectual perplexity and delusion is abstract ideas. He insisted in his Introduction to the *Principles of Human Knowledge* that: (a) abstract ideas could not be produced, (b) they were not necessary for the transmission of knowledge, and (c) they were contradictory and unpredictable and therefore incomprehensible. However, Berkeley also defends two metaphysical ideas: namely, idealism and immaterialism. He believed to be is to be perceived.

More recent methodologies of material culture have mainly concentrated on the use and chronological connotation of artifacts occupying an anecdote or assessing the book itself as a marketable commodity disseminated on the demand. The study of comparative literature and aesthetics, and more extensively, cultural spaces, is strengthened by recent studies on materiality. For instance, Fred Moten's discourse in *Black and Blur* on Marxism, dialectical materialism, and Kant's philosophies of freedom and nature employ an (im)material approach to understanding cosmopolitanism, a priori customs, and being. His disjuncture of material /immaterial conditions is not always opposed to traditional philosophy, which maintains an uprising in the intangible portion of thinking, evidence, and tendencies as disaffected from the actual domain of practical life and methods. For instance, numerous movements towards subjectivity have explored embodiment and the materiality of thought.

On the other hand, some may define the dynamics of people's spatial conception explored through fictitious spaces as immaterial. As a result, the distinction in materiality/immateriality is progressively leading to possible reconfigurations of quotidian linkages, imprints, and the interplay between these three topics: cosmopolitanism, dialectics, and the climate. How do people understand that the (im)materiality of literature conveys the vital clash between tangible and immaterial-psychological, mental, and spiritual?

Louisiana State University, USA

An Ontology of Nothingness: From a Matrixial Dialectic to a Multivalent Ontology of Matrixial Materialism, Endo Interior-Relation Toward an Ontological Multivalence Versus Substantive Immaterialism

ARANTZAZU SARATXAGA ARREGI

The American literary critic Nancy Katharine Hayles uses a book chapter from Anne Balsamo's *Technologies of Gendered Body* entitled "My mother was a computer" as the title of her monograph on the materiality of literary texts in the age of digital cultures (Hayles 2005). This examination is less an assertion than an indication of a post-biological future in which the body and its constitution, namely corporeality, explode into new forms of expression if they do not disintegrate due to digital disembodiment processes. The reduction of corporeality to the mere computational operators of a cognitive machine was also addressed in Hayles' book *How We Became Posthuman* (Hayles 1999). The author's position on posthumanist approaches is undoubtedly skeptical, even decidedly opposed: "a call to contest for versions of the posthuman that would acknowledge the importance of embodiment and be conducive to enhancing human and nonhuman life on the planet" (Hayles 2005, Prologue 2). Digital media control a process of dematerialization of communication channels, the after-effects of which on social systems have led to posthumanist theories. Thus, they describe the human of the digital age as characterized by the dissolution of the mind/body duality in a hybrid assemblage of power flows. The model for the posthumanist Anthropos is Donna Haraway's cyborg manifesto, which, beyond being a metaphor of the cybernetic human, is intended to address a program that completely abolishes the demarcations defining humanity vis-à-vis other species through the control procedures of information flows (Wiener 1985, 1-30).

The chapter "My Mother Was a Computer" should be understood as an objection to reducing the corporeal to a mere operative functionality and the degradation of matter underlying this, which favors symbolically formal statements about cognition. Nevertheless, the young discipline of cybernetics that emerged in the post-war period aimed at the dissolution of classical dualities on which the Western culture of humanism had relied so heavily. The laws of control in a machine system are supposed to overcome dichotomies such as mind vs. body as well as nature vs. culture in favor of a new kind of reality cognition (Max Bense 1951, pp.429-449) whereby each particle of a system presupposes its entity, connections, and relations with the others are perceived and thought. Personal realities are determined by the flow of information produced in net-like connections. In this way, reality becomes a complex (dis) organized phenomenon woven together from non-linear dynamic assemblages. The implementation of cybernetic knowledge in the sciences aims to redefine matter. It is not only the information sciences and cybernetics that have subjected the concept of matter to a new interpretation. The

transformation of physics into complex science had likewise already put materiality on the path to dematerialization. Information is neither matter nor energy (Wiener 1948, 166). Signal transmission is an entropic process dependent on probability calculations. Since the thermodynamic turn in the natural and engineering sciences, the classical concept of matter has disintegrated into a distribution order of particles whose nature is not determined by their built material but by their position in the physical system.

New materialism takes up the challenge of reinterpreting matter based on the turn in physics and information sciences. Although materialism in its respective expressions, whether historical or naturalistic, goes back to a substance doctrine, New Materialism seeks to give some substance to materials realities. This challenge means a rejection of the hylemorphic schemes of Aristotelian metaphysics, which imply that something is underlying matter, namely raw material (*hylé*). This concept can be informed by the ideas from which the form arises. Even phenomenology, which has raised such massive objections against substantialism, uses *hylé* to reference something underlying.

In this context, Hayles' "My mother was a computer" corresponds to the requirement of matter to give significance to corporeality in the digital age and beyond the hylemorphic dichotomy, namely, matter vs. form. She seeks new forms of literary materiality in the tension between embodiment/body/physicality and information: "From my perspective, this development requires repositioning materiality as distinct from physicality and re-envisioning the material basis for hybrid texts and subjectivities" (Hayles 1999, Prologue 2). For Hayles, materiality is "an emergent property created through dynamic interactions between physical characteristics and signifying strategies" (Hayles 1999, Prologue 3). This description is very close to the nature of operationally closed systems, the organizational principle based on recursive dynamics from which new properties are created, resulting from the system assuming new states of change. With the equation of materiality and emergent organizational structure, for Katharine Hayles, the computational universe remains a metaphorical expression for matter, "that is, the claim that the universe is generated through computational processes running on a vast computational mechanism underlying all of physical reality" (Hayles 1999, Prologue 3). With this, we want to introduce the question of whether there cannot be the inverse relationship between the model of a computational universe and observed reality (Foerster, von Heinz, 1987, p.142), namely whether the computational universe is not the model of autopoietic processes of the respective systems such as biological, social, anthropological, and psychological.

A Computational Universe denotes the absoluteness of the computational techno milieu, encompassing all functions of the sphere of life. With the same claim to include a specific nature, namely nature in all spheres of the social and cultural sphere, Romanticism used the signifier mother to ascribe to her the role of nurturer and even a kind of primordality and untamed authenticity. Katherine Hayles bridges the distance between the romantic mother-nature to a computational mother-universe: "so now the Universal Computer is envisioned as the Motherboard of us all" (Hayles 1999, Prologue 3). The shift from the mother to the universal computer, in analogy to the Romantic conceptions of a mother nature that naturalizes the world and nurtures all creatures inherent in the world, is drawn from the concepts of the Romantic worldview. The mother-computer is a composite, with the computer-based on the signifier mother, just as with mother-nature. This notion neither forms a metaphor nor an idea. Now, the question remains: what is meant by mother?

Mother signifiers (along with all kinds of mothers) can be synthesized into the philosophical term “the matrixial.” Far from being historical-cultural research on the concept of the matrix in the histories of cultures, the present philosophical approach rejects a merely diachronic reading (Saussure 1967) of the word matrix. Instead, it is a matter of “creating concepts” (Deleuze 1991, p.8), a process located at the blurred interface between the artistic practice of creation and the scientific rigor of an analytical and synthetic process. The matrixial is not the matrix but its philosophical nature.

This article aims to explain in detail the concept of the matrixial with particular reference to the dialectical structure determined by it, called “perinatal dialectics. “In this respect, birth, the core dialectical movement, is the determinant for the conceptualization of the matrixial, which means a transition from a prenatal to a postnatal world. The perinatal dialectic of childbearing, or that an attachment to the world follows the dis-binding from the maternal body is kinetic. What sort of materiality is to be assigned to the kinetics of a transitional process of becoming? The philosophical category of the matrixial refers to a philosophical problem: the difference between the prenatal and the postnatal instinct of formation. In this way, the matrixial is a means to understand better (im)material transference related to conditions of birth and rebirth, physically and philosophically.

The semantic meaning of the word “matrix” requires an explanation of terms. The word matrix is polysemic because it contains several meanings. Its applicability, therefore, extends to a wide range of fields of knowledge, such as mathematics, geology, botany, biology, technical language, and linguistics. The word matrix has different meanings in German, depending on the semantic context used. In biology, a matrix is understood as “a shell of chromosomes, “an “amorphous basic substance “(connective tissue), and the “germinal layer from which something is created. “In mathematics, it has the meaning of a scheme of mathematical quantities representing linear images and describing linear systems of equations. In linguistics, it refers to a scheme for the assignment of characteristics to linguistic units, especially for representing the sound structure—definition of the word Matrix in Duden. In the first place, the word “mother “stands for the root word that can be based on various qualities (mother-human, mother-animal). Here is the first conclusion to be drawn: The Matrix can be described as a set encompassing all types of mothers (Saratxaga 2019, 22).

Nevertheless, it is necessary to identify the specific characteristic of the respective types of mothers. For this purpose, an etymological analysis must be carried out. The matrix contains the Indo-European root -ma, which means to form (bilden) or generate (erzeugen), and a drive that is one of the life forces (Blumenbach 1789, 25) such as procreation, nourishment, and reproduction of living organisms. The anthropologist and anatomist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach defined this life force as the formative instinct, *nisus formativus*, responsible for the ontogenetic development of living beings and drove the formation of their forms. Secondly, it should be noted that the Latin word matrix is borrowed from the Greek word for uterus, so that the semantic value of the term matrix, namely mother, is accompanied by a second one, uterus. Strictly speaking, the word “uterus “represents a tautology: it describes a mother who has the property to give birth. However, this expression is not redundant because not all women who give birth have the qualities that constitute a mother. Accordingly (as already explained in the semantic-analytical explanation of the word matrix), giving birth encompasses that specific difference by which the group of all kinds of mothers differs from other sets and is consequently defined as such.

The matrixial characterize the general nature of a *nisus formativus*, namely a formative instinct, which exerts its effect both intrauterinally and extrauterinally. As already indicated above, childbearing is the formative instinct, the *nisus formativus* par excellence. The philosophical and ontological features of the generative power of childbearing culminate in an ontological translocalization: birth, childbearing beyond a multiplication of the species, signifies an onto-topological relocation whereby the new individuals continue their morphogenesis under altered environmental conditions. Birth results from a “gestational period” in the mother’s body; the ontogenetic formation, achieving maturation, must be continued extrauterinally. The leap from the intrauterine to the extrauterine environment takes on the significance of an ontological translocalization, as already explained since *Dasein* is and has become essentially formed under environmental conditions.

The term *nisus formativus*, which Johann Friedrich Blumenbach explained in detail in his book “Über den Bildungstrieb und das Zeugungsgeschäft” (On the Formative Instinct and the Procreative Business) in 1781, is ultimately about a biological concept of self-organization. According to Blumenbach, the *nisus formativus*, namely the instinct of formation, is interpreted as the inner force of organized matter. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, a representative of German idealism, expanded the concept of self-organization into a general systemic philosophy of nature. The dynamics at work in nature are owed to no external motor or metaphysical cause; instead, matter has self-organizing powers that correspond to the dynamics of nature (Schelling 1799, pp.63-271). Self-organization assumed a new interpretation in cybernetics after World War II, when it became increasingly urgent to develop a general theory of the circular (recursive) causality of feedback mechanisms and self-reference. Self-organization—a process in which some form of total order emerges from the local interactions between the parts of an initially disordered system. The concept had another revival towards the end of the 1960s in explaining phenomena of dissipative structures.

In addition, however, all types of mothers differ from one another. The difference lies in each mother’s reference to the framework in which she is placed; in other words, she is embedded in a specific environment. The mother-animal refers to the animal world, the mother-plant to the plant world, and the mother-metal to the metal world. A synthetic conclusion from the inductive semantic and etymological process used so far may be drawn: matrix is composed of the genetic equality of bearing (the same characteristic attributed to the genus), which is complementary to the eidetic difference (the respective specific difference of all types of mothers), and the referentiality in which the formation force of the respective singular mother is carried out (the environment in which each individual is formed).

The ambiguity of matrix is based on the singularity of any sort of mother is not due to her formation force. Instead, each kind of mother is determined by a relation to the respective individual’s environment. This notion leads to semantics being pushed into the background and semiotics coming to the foreground to clarify the term further. The meaning of any kind of mother is derived from the relation of the respective mother to her environment so that the reference determines it. In this way, a problem can be revealed, which transcends language boundaries and tackles a philosophical question.

The problem, therefore, has an ontological and logical-categorical nature. Firstly, the etymological origin of the word matrix, namely mother and uterus, refers to an ontological difference, especially since the mother stands for a postnatal and the uterus for the prenatal

formation force. Prenatal and postnatal environments determine the extreme values of an ontological difference: the postnatal environment is called the world instead of prenatal, which cannot be assigned to the category world. Secondly, categorical and logical consequences can be derived from the ontological dimension. Starting from the assumption that the determination of different types of mothers can be attributed to the environments in which they are and will be, one may conclude that there are as many environments as there are types of mothers.

At this point, and beyond its etymological meaning, a matrix is a threefold concept consisting of the difference between mother (formative instinct in the world) and womb (formative instinct in the non-world). Accordingly, it includes a reference to the difference between the extrauterine and the intrauterine formative instinct under which it operates, which we have called the degree of worldliness. The difference between the world-internal and the world-external formative instincts is that the extrauterine formative instinct is dedicated to the productive forces of the world (following on from this, according to our thesis, the mother plays a world-formative role), and processes of de-differentiation and differentiation characterize the intrauterine formative instinct in a non-worldly space in which, however, life occurs. The triad of mother—womb—the world is thus at the center of intellectual apprehension of the concept of a matrix in which the semantic differentiation of mother/womb points to relatedness to the world and simultaneously to the correspondence of womb/mother as a productive force of the intra- and extrauterine field.

As already indicated, the mother-animal refers to the animal world, just as the mother-human refers to the human world or the mother-computer refers to the computer world. A multivalent worldliness stands against a single-valued substantialist immaterialism of the idea of a “big Other” (Lacan 1997). The mother-X, denoting the mother which contains all kinds of mothers in itself, is considered from the point of view of matrixial exclusively as a formalism to refer to the incompleteness of the set of all kinds of mothers. However, the relation of the respective mothers to the environment is a prerequisite of possibility. Individual realities only arise in and through relations because that entity is embedded in a particular environment or, in the words of New Materialism, connected to an assemblage. In this respect, the matrixial shares with New Materialism the characteristic of relations. The accusation against the materialist approach that “there must be something for the relation to exist” can be countered by analogy with Gilbert Simondon’s approach to the principle of individuation (Simondon 1964), according to which the relation precedes a principle of relation, pure resonance and possibility-prerequisite of the same. Thus, relations apply to the place or topology in which they arise. If an individual is to be so developed in the intrauterine field that its adaptation to the outside does not require elaborate support, the degree of maternity is lower than that of species that possess a higher cooperative rearing system for adaptation to worldliness. Consequently, the theorem could state that the degree of maternalism correlates with the degree of worldliness. Accordingly, the ontological difference between mother and uterus unfolds in polyvalent ontologies, insofar as there are infinite environments, however incomplete the set of all types of mothers may be.

The transition from closed, worldless space to open worldliness has the radical result that fetal genesis is becoming human. The phenomenon of childbearing is thus an ontological event. It consists of transferring from one environment to another or transferring the mother’s inner body into the world. Accordingly, something is only about

worldliness from the moment it is transferred from one environment, the mother's inner body, into worldliness, wherein the mother already exists as a being and is consequently there, in alterity to her world, the new being must relate to worldliness. The matrixial dialectic is called perinatal. This notion means that every connection, like assemblages, goes back to an unbinding, so that connections, assemblages mean a completely new arrangement of the inner organizational structure of the system. In this context, we want to present the principles of matrixial dialectics in this chapter: on the one hand, the kinetic process of birth and, secondly, the liminal as medial space and epitome of the maternal body.

From a matrixial perspective, birth knows neither beginning nor end, but only a transition between two worlds. Birth is a central fact for shaping existence; however, it should not be understood as the beginning of a development or the return point of a path but as a transition. The transition into the world is a fact: the fetus moves into an externality that is an open world compared to the intrauterine closed space. The transition into the outside is a necessary fact of development. Hannah Arendt refers to the carelessness of natality in philosophy. Arriving in the world is not opposed to the "finitude of the facticity of existence" (Heidegger 1953, pp.237-241), but the miracle "that one may have confidence in the world, and that one may hope for the world" (Arendt 2002, p.316) is part of and the result of being born. Being born means beginning in the extrauterine milieu, the execution of a new beginning that is set again and again, and this exclusively through human action. The miracle that repeatedly interrupts the course of the world and the course of human things and saves them from ruin "[...] is ultimately the fact of natality, of being born [...]". The "miracle," even if now only written in quotation marks, "consists in the fact that people are born at all, and with them the new beginning that they can realize in action by virtue of their being born [...]" (Arendt 1998, pp.442)

The ontological dimension of motherliness lies in a transcendental conditionality: only in alterity to the mother can what has arrived relate to worldliness. The mother-X is in an intermediate position. She is an intermediary between inside and outside or between the pre- and postnatal environments. Through contact with the mother, the offspring is aware of the difference between the inside and outside of the world and is aware of its existence because it makes it wonder where the "I" is. The mother now plays the role of an iteration in this estrangement (*Entäußerung*). Now the two ontological possibilities – inside and outside – unfold in three potential worldness: the worldhood of the newborn (the ontomorphogenetic worldhood of the newborn), the worldness of the mother (a worldly formation force), and inwardly in the pre-worldness of the mother's body (the worldly formation force).

This ontological development has specific psychoanalytical consequences. The mother's figure is fundamental for the self-realization of the ego, even its condition of possibility. In contrast to Freud's theory pattern, according to which separation from the mother's body places the offspring in an unfulfillable longing for the impossible re-merging (a pattern Lacan follows and completes in his mirror stage), here the primary approach of the object relationship theories should be emphasized. British object relationship theory, to which Sándor Ferenczi, Michael Balint, and William R. D. Fairbairn, among others, have contributed, has promoted a Copernican turn in the psychoanalytic tradition. Within the framework of this theory, the analysis of the psyche was carried out based on the drive theory regarding observation and the basis of the environmental conditions of a relational need regarding participation. The actual relationship of the maternal bond contributes

to the child's personality development and entangles it. The homeostatic model of mother and child (Bowlby 1982) replaces Lacan's mirror stage "matrix" (1949, pp. 449-455).

Just as matriarchy and social theories prove, the medial position of the mother defines a critical figure in the formation process of social units (Claessens 1985). An examination of the mother's figure in societies traces her back to the elementary structure, which can be seen in the strategies of bonding and alliance systems. The mother-child bond is the first cohesive force, a microsocial structure of the social system. A social system is characterized by its difference from the environment in this respect (Luhmann 1979): its difference from that which does not belong to it, namely the first nature before all else (Claessens 1985, p.15). In general, as the word implies, socialization is a process that does not consist of structures at the natural level but their supersession (*Aufhebung*). The prefix *exo-* can indicate the reference to what exists externally in the natural bond core. Social, ethno- and anthropological research agree that *exo-gamy* is constitutive for the formation of social groups. Although the *matrixial* determines the *exogamic* strategy of social education processes, it does so in the context of a balance with the *endo-gamic* order (Reich 1972). The generic term *matrix* indicates all kinds of mothers and thus comprises the genetic reference to the mother within itself and accordingly introduces her reference to "first nature" into the social entity. Socialization succeeds *exogamically* to the mother species but *endogamically* to the *matrix* *genos*. In summary, the ontological dimension of motherliness lies in a transcendental conditionality: only in alterity to the mother can what has arrived relate to worldliness. Against the backdrop of this synthesis of educational drive and worldliness, the question can be asked whether alteration processes in worldlessness are perceptible.

As the *nisus formativus* characterizes the *matrixial*, its materiality is characterized by self-organization. The materialist interpretation of emergent processes does not lie in a kind of self-reproductivity of the system, as in Katherine Hayles's attribution of the computer to the mother: "Computer gives birth and digital subjects" (Hayles 1999, Prologue 5). The assemblage between those particles to which they are connected then becomes crucial to the question of connections rather than the organization of a structure, that is, first, what is the relation of the mother to the world, and second, what is the relation of the womb and the world? As shown in the previous chapter, the assemblage constitutes the bonds and connections: in the dialectical core of the concept lies the *matrixial*. The first question can be explained with the axiom that the mother is internal to the world. The inwardness relation determines the mother-world bond. However, the *endo-relation* between mother and world can be further transferred to the respective mother-signifiers, for the mother-cell is internal to the mother-man, who is internal to the mother-earth. The offspring is housed in the mother's body, and both individual beings form a co-evolutionary space in which the extrauterine progression of the offspring succeeds. The second question can be answered with the axiom that the uterus is external to the world. The uterus fulfills the function of a milieu for onto- and embryogenetic processes up to the transition of the birth-ready fetus into the new milieu. It encompasses a space with the peculiar characteristic that it cannot be determined in the temporal and spatial dimension of the exorcised world. From this problem, the processes of differentiation in a closed environment and consequent lack of alterity derive the womb's description as a non-externalized environment. The alterity-lessness of the uterine sphere can be described as a worldless space from a *matrixial* perspective due to its closedness

and world externality. The womb is only in the world because the mother's body surrounds it—as such, it is external to the world. In this respect, it forms a speculative space, the experience of interiority of which can only be remembered through externalized signifiers.

A strong argument that justifies the mother-animals' inwardness concerning the world can be found in the evolutionary-biological function of mother animals. The role of mother-animals contributes to the self-preservation of mother-animals phylogeny and the environment in which the individual mothers are embedded. With this argument, anthropologist, behavioral scientist, and primatologist Sarah Blaffer-Hrdy has turned the Darwinian theory of selective adaptation upside down (Blaffer-Hrdy 1999). Darwin's theory of selective adaptation hardly pays any attention to the female side of evolution, especially since, according to him, positive reproductive success is exclusively due to adaptability. On the other hand, in her many years of research, the primatologist based on all behavioral ecologies.

According to Blaffer-Hrdy, David Lack is one of the “first evolutionary biologists to study the reproductive behavior of mothers. “His contribution to the behavior of mothers in biological systems was followed by the American biologists George Williams and Robert Trivers have put forward the thesis that positive reproductive success is actually due to concern for developing and conserving the species in question. The agents that contribute to guaranteeing extrauterine ontomorphogenetic development are called mothers, as long as they are the source of supply for the offspring. The more the mother is concerned about ensuring safe conditions for the growth and development of the offspring (Sloterdijk 2008), the greater the reproductive success and the greater the adaptability of the offspring to the environment. In this respect, the mother is the very first environment in which the offspring are housed. She is the offspring's first link to the world because she cares for it and houses it in her body. The relationship is one-sided and asymmetrical because the cycle of goods begins where something is already there. This very first one-sided and asymmetrical relationship is parasitic (Serres 1980) from the point of view of a communicative relation. It lays the basis of every exchange, especially since the act of communication is an attempt to compensate and a regulatory mechanism to bring the respective inequality into balance. The asymmetrical position of mothers should not be confused with sacrificial behavior. The opposite is the case. Behavioral biologists have proven that selfless mothers positively affect reproductive success in the long term (Blaffer-Hrdy 1999). In this respect, the care system is concerned with neutralizing the uneven gift of mothers to their offspring in the cycle of response and exchange.

In summary, the parasitic economy of offspring can be described by the following equivalence formulae between concern and assistance: care arouses concern, and concern regulates care (Trivers 1974, pp.249-264). According to Sarah Blaffer-Hrdy, mother-centered worlds are the most robust worlds in which a higher level of care is created, the costs of which are distributed between a large number of helpers so that the benefits outweigh the costs. A mother-centered world is a robust rearing system with very high reproductive success. The parasitic interaction between the host, mother, or all-motherly instance and the guest is ontologically determined. The offspring arrives in a world as a concern (*besorgten Welt*) (Heidegger 1953, pp.211-212). In this way, the mother's existence not only signifies her relation to the world she inhabits.

Instead, her body provides an environment that is a prerequisite for the extrauterine continuation of the offspring's formation. According to the biologist Jakob Johann von

Uexküll, only the interior of the individual being is connected to the environment of its surroundings (Uexküll 2014). The parasitic relationship between guest and host finds its equilibrium in the interactive relationship between the inner world and the environment; this co-evolutionary field is where the formation force takes shape. The ontological proof of the matrixial cannot be exhausted in an internal and external relationship between two elements because the relationship between mother and offspring forms a co-evolutionary field embedded in the broader environment. This juncture is where the structural, logical proof of a multi-valued (Günther 1991) matrixiology comes into play. It blurs the sharp distinction between that which falls within the classification universal and falls under particular. According to the doctrine of the matrixial, which serves as a basis for ontological polyvalence, the metaphysical distinction between universals and individuals contains a misconception (Whitehead 1929). Every so-called universal is particular in so far as it is what it is.

Moreover, each individual is universal because it enters into the nature of other existing individuals. Universal relativity thus determines the ontological polyvalence of the matrixial system. Accordingly, the infinity of types of mothers does not enter into any hierarchical structure. This axiom is devoted to the description of the womb as a whole. As a whole, it possesses a formative instinct, but it is withdrawn from the world. It is deprived of the formative power of the world, but processes of differentiation and formation take place within it. In the context of how processes of differentiation and formation can succeed without alterity in an organism that has not been excreted, this axiom addresses three essential characteristics of the uterus in the background. The prenatal field is anticipated; it is removed from the language, from consciousness, it is always world-determined according to the logocentric principles on which philosophy is based (Derrida 1967). The example of the allegorical motif of the uterus to explain a pre-cosmic state and the ontogenetic process of embryonic development proves the invalidity and failure of the metaphysical identity logic and substantial program for the matrixial.

Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim (called Paracelsus) used the allegory of the womb as an explanation of the high abstraction of a pre-cosmic state for his astromedical and alchemical research (Paracelsus 1926, p.188). Carl Gustav Jung's depth psychology takes up the pictorial symbol of the iconography of ancient Egypt, Ouroboros, the womb. It is supposed to represent the embryonic state of consciousness by standing as a symbol for all the potentialities contained in it and assigned the meaning of perfection and completeness. Alchemical writings use the symbolic meaning of Ouroboros, the original state of transformation wherein all possibilities are contained in a differentiated and amorphous state. The metaphysical interpretation of a pre-cosmic state of the universe came to light, especially with Plato. He had called the pre-cosmic order the genus of all contained possibilities. He calls it *chora* (Platon, *Timaeus* 49a.b), and it contains possibilities in a de-differentiated state in which everything is one, namely complete and perfect. A third genus is ascribed to it, which is not equal to being or not being and whose access requires a "certain bastard thinking" (Platon, *Timaeus* 52b).

The metaphysical perfection of a pre-cosmic order is a paradox (Derrida 1993) from the point of view of fundamental logic. The order withdrawing from the world becomes entangled in a contradiction to an excluded third party, namely between being and not-being (Platon, *Timaeus*. 52b). The metaphysical conclusion is that the matrixial ontology necessarily becomes entangled in a logical paradox. The intrauterine space is withdrawn

from the world; it is worldliness. Does ontology legitimate the worldlessness? Heidegger's existential ontology analysis provides no answer; an ontology of worldlessness would turn it upside down even more. In this ontology, being is superior to nothingness, so that the negation has an exclusively predictive value (Heidegger 2004). Being can be predicted with a negation. Non-being is indeed a kind of being, but without being, remaining negated in its totality. Its worldlessness has to be assigned to a speculative genus: The womb is a genus that cannot be understood in the sense of the Aristotelian schema as the "sum of all species," but as a surreal genus that contains the possible, pure possibility and de-differentiated oaths. If the becoming of the ontological principle of the matrix remains to be proven, hylomorphism— a derivative of Aristotle's identity logic—can not explain ontogenesis (Simondon 1964, pp.1-64).

The philosophical system presented here aims to establish a philosophical category, the matrixial. For this purpose, the system uses three axioms, employing which the ontological nature of "the matrixial" concept is shown in all its breadth. Indeed, these unambiguous statements were not affirmed as accurate, but the truthfulness was proven with the help of propositions and problems. With this, I want to summarise the core interpretation of the philosophical term "the matrixial." It represents a multivalent ontology that states that there are as many milieus as there are kinds of mothers. The set of all kinds of mothers is incomplete, so the multiplicity of ontologies expands as far as the multiplicity of kinds expands. It corresponds to heterarchical axiology.

In contrast to the hierarchical system value of ontological conditions, which Heidegger's fundamental analytics of being established in that *Dasein* is world-forming vis-à-vis worldless being, the matrixial perceives this order of being as equal. According to the matrixial, no identity-logical being is superior to another. All kinds of being are equal since the respective conditions of existence are equally interpretative. Accordingly, the matrixial extends the meaning of ontology beyond *Dasein*. The world, however, does not exhaust ontological multivalence; rather, it constitutes an anthropological problem for philosophy and its justification for fundamental ontology. From the perspective of matrixial philosophy, the world is an anthropological problem, not an ontological condition. To this end, the environment becomes a general ontology of immediacy. Based on Uexküll's thesis that the inner structure of individual living beings is in a bond with the environment, the philosophical category of the matrixial aims to establish the educational drive in the immediate relation by creating a co-evolutionary ontological field through the inner/environmental interaction. The matrixial is an ontologically determined philosophical category that demonstrates the formative generative power of these manifold worldlinesses. The matrixial is a category of co-relations and endo-relations; it dissolves the boundary outside/inside for an immediate multivalency of the bond between environment and inner self.

Notes

1. See Das große Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache, <http://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Matrix>. Matrix is borrowed from Latin and derived from the feminization of mother (mater); See also "mater, matris," in Vaan Michiel, A. (ed.): Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the other Italic Languages. Boston: Brill 2008, p. 367. Its feminization refers less to the feminine characteristic of mothers, which would be a tautology, but rather to a classification that includes different types of mothers. Matrix refers to plant-mother, animal-mother, or machine-mother. Definition Matrix: late 14c., from O.Fr. Matrice, from L. matrix (gen. matricis) "pregnant animal," in L.L. "womb," also "source, origin," from mater (gen. matris) "mother." The sense of "place or medium where something is developed" is first recorded in the 1550s; a sense of "embedding or enclosing mass" was first recorded 1640s. The logical sense of "array of possible combinations of truth-values" is attested from 1914. Cf. <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?searchmode=none&search=matrix>. The Latin flexion from Latin matrix, basic form, scheme, frame including its substance; especially: uterus; hardly interpretable", in: Robert, R. Anderson/ Reichmann, Ulrich G. (eds): Frühneuhochdeutsches Wörterbuch, 9 vol., Berlin: W. de Gruyter 2013, p. 1996. Latin etymological description of the word matrix: "Matrixicis. Mother, breeding animal; progenitor mother, uterus; stem roll, matricle". (since Varro, rom., also matricialis, 'belonging to the mother (womb)' (since Zeno) and matricula f. 'Matricula' since Inscr. 2. century and veg. láõñëííLyd. mens. 1, 28; cf. also matricarius a troop since Inscr. 3. century, matricularius 'included in the register of the poor' Greg. Tur.) is added to mater after nutrix. (Leumann-Stolz 244); in Walde, Alois: Latin Etymological Dictionary, two volumes, Heidelberg: Winter 1954, p. 50.
2. Seit ihm ist es, als haben die Menschen [...] das Faktum des Geborens nicht ernst nehmen können [...] nur das des Sterbens." Cf. Arendt, Hannah: Denktagebuch. 1950 bis 1973, p. 463, quoted from Lütkehaus, ibid., p. 28. Cf. also: „Plato ist sozusagen der Vater der Geburtsvergessenheit. Das Defizit gilt indes generell: ‚Merkwürdigerweise hat [...] noch keine Philosophie, auch keine politische Philosophie dazu vermocht, den Menschen auf seine ‚Geburtlichkeit‘ hin anzusprechen, nämlich darauf hin, dass mit jedem von uns ein Anfang in die Welt kam und dass Handeln im Sinne des Einselbst ein Anfang ist.“ Arendt, Hannah: Über die Revolution. Munich: Piper 1994, p. 276.
3. R. Briffault: *The Mothers*, vol. 1-4, 1927. L.H. Morgan: *Ancient Society*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1964; Bachofen, J.: *Das Mutterrecht und Urreligion*. Malinowski, B.: *The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia. An Ethnographic Account of Courtship, Marriage, and Family Life Among the Natives of the Trobriand Islands*, British New Guinea. London 1929.
4. See Sarah Blaffer-Hrady: *Mother Nature*.

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The Arrival of Ecological Objects: Conceptions of Materiality for the Anthropocene

SEAN PATRICK COLLINS

The Marxist analysis of the commodity fetish follows a pattern of surface and depth. Related to this pattern is the notion of presence/absence, or, to follow Heideggerian language, of concealment and disclosure. The fetish analysis allows Marx to demystify the commodity by revealing its withdrawn reality as a social product. In Sara Ahmed's language, the Marxian fetish analysis is rooted in a critique of presence through Marx's insistence on historicity and labor within the commodity. "Marxism allows us to rethink the object as not only in history but as an effect of historical processes," Ahmed writes, "the Marxian...critique of the idea that the object is 'in the present' or that the object is 'before me'" (240). Ahmed's reading of Marxian commodity fetishism marries an analytical framework of concealment and disclosure with object-oriented analysis.

A synthesis of commodity fetishism and object-oriented ontology (OOO) proposed by Graham Harman follows. I will first analyze Marx and Engel's structural account of the commodity fetish, focusing on the concept of presence. I will then turn to an analysis of Harman's quadruple object, paying careful attention to the similar analytic framework of concealment and disclosure echoed in the commodity fetish. Synthesizing these seemingly divergent theoretical constructions of the object, I argue, is to infuse OOO with a critique of capitalism, while also reinstalling a robust materialism within commodity fetishism. What is at stake in the former is politicizing the withdrawn, autonomous object; what is at stake in the latter is an "updating" of Marxian critical analysis by accounting for objects in their material, environmental, and ecological complexity. Rather than argue that these two frameworks are mutually exclusive, as some critics have argued, the larger goal here is to examine how a synthesis of these two frameworks offers a robust political ecology so needed during the era of climate change.

In "The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret" (Marx 230), Marx works to uncover the secret of the fetish as a mode of concealment and mystification. Marx begins the analysis by pointing to the "strange[ness]" (230-231) that arises when a distinction is drawn between the use-value and the exchange-value of the commodity. Objects in their use-value are what furnish the world. As I write, the computer has the use-value of recording text, the coffee cup holds my beverage, and the table holds these objects for my use. Indeed, Marx notes that "there is nothing mysterious" (231) about the utility of an object. What is important in Marx's discussion is that the use-value of a given object is not magically present, but instead is shaped and constructed through labor. For Marx, the fashioning of use-values through the creation of objects is an expression of our species-being. Humans produce goods derived from laboring upon the objects of nature to provide heat, shelter, food, and clothing as part of species-being (Marx 63). From the Marxian perspective, nature is our "inorganic body" (63) that we shape and labor with in order to "objectify [our] species-life" (64).

Things, however, get strange when the object becomes a commodity. The object takes on “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” (231) as a commodity. The strangeness of the commodity is rooted in the commodity’s transcendence of its sensuousness. That is, commodities become fetishistic in the totemic sense — animated, lively, and seemingly autonomous. Marx writes:

It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, concerning all other commodities, it stands on its head and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will. (231)

It is precisely the agency of the table, expressed here as a kind of dancing, that Marx’s fetish analysis demystifies. Marx uncovers the concealed nature of the commodity as really the externalization of the social and economic relations behind the creation of the object itself. For Ahmed, the suspicious hermeneutics of commodity fetishism allow objects to arrive through the disclosure of the social relations behind the object. To look at the object in its purely sensuous features is to become blind to the productive social labor which has transformed the object into a commodity. “[Objects] take shape through social action, through ‘the activity of a whole succession of generations,’” Ahmed points out, “which is forgotten when the object is apprehended as simply given” (241). The hermeneutics of suspicion that Ricoeur identified in the Marxian fetish analysis is thus a necessary condition for exposing the social relations behind the object. The fetish analysis demonstrates that the object’s seemingly mystical qualities, such as its ability to dance, are instead the result of its socio-material conditions of production. Marx summarizes the mistaken view of the commodity fetish by stating: “there the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race” (233). What is fascinating here is the relation between the object’s fetish character and OOO’s construction of objects that are “endowed with a life of their own” and that enter “into relations with each other.” As we will see, OOO transvalues the Marxian fetish analysis by emphasizing the concealed nature of objects in order to re-mystify the object as an irreducible and agential object.

Marx’s plumbing of the commodity’s seemingly concealed depths, and thus erasing the mysterious agency therein, leads him to posit the labor theory of value. Objects are not vibrantly animated and do not have social relations of their own, but are instead “social hieroglyphics” (Marx 234) that distill the value of labor in their construction. By recognizing the “social character of private labor and the social relations between individual workers” (Marx 236), their mystical character disappears — the table, that is, ceases dancing and becomes reflective of the human processes that create and exchanged it. Commodities become materially grounded; Marx demonstrates that the mysterious quality of objects is actually derived from the material conditions of production that grant them value and make them exchangeable in the market. As Marx puts it, fetish analysis reveals that commodities are “material relations between persons and social relations between things” (233). What is important to emphasize in the fetish analysis is Marx’s insistence on the binary between surface/depth and presence/absence. To embrace the fetishism of commodities is, in a sense, to be content with the “surface” of the commodity rather than the “depth” of social relations behind it. Conversely, to perform the fetish analysis is to reveal the “absent” social relations that allow the table to appear as though it is dancing. As Ahmed helpfully points out, the fetish analysis allows the table to arrive in its rich

socio-historical processes: “this table was made by somebody, and there is a history to its arrival, a history of transportation, which could be redescribed as a history of changing hands” (243). Thus, Marx’s commodity fetishism allows the table to “arrive” by erasing the “depths” or “absences” that are concealed by the material conditions of its production. OOO similarly relies on the distinctions between surface/depth and presence/absence. Where the Marxist fetish analysis works toward the demystified arrival of the commodity, OOO instead emphasizes the withdrawn reality of objects outside of human perceptions and concerns. The withdrawn quality of objects, in OOOO, becomes mystical through the fundamental irreducibility of objects as such — tables, that is, seem to once again dance. OOO has different strands with minor discrepancies, but the movement is primarily derived from the work of Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, Levi Bryant, and Ian Bogost. I will focus on Harman’s Heideggerian flavored OOO as explored in his book, *The Quadruple Object*. Harman’s conception of the object begins precisely at the zenith of commodity fetishism in the Marxian perspective. The fundamental thesis of OOO is that objects are autonomous and that they withdraw from human perspective and from other objects. Harman’s approach is, on the surface, a re-fetishization of the object. Where Marx emphasizes the need to expose the human social relations that underlie the seemingly mystical character of the commodity, Harman is instead attempting to re-mystify the object by pointing out its mystical, withdrawn reality.

Harman would consider Marx to be caught in the traps of correlationism and anthropocentrism. The term correlationism is borrowed from Quentin Meillassoux’s *After Finitude* to describe how 20th-century philosophy is centralized around subject-object relations. Meillassoux defines correlationism by stating: “nothing sensible...can exist in the way it is given to me in the thing by itself, when it is not related to me or to any other living creature” (1). Correlationism is the idea that thought is always correlated with the external world, and that humans can never speak about an object from outside of human thought — to speak about nonhuman objects is to be caught within the correlationist circle. That is, to speak about something in the world is to only report its givenness to human perception rather than account for nonhumans themselves. Marx’s fetish analysis certainly falls into the correlationist circle because the goal of the fetish analysis is to uncover the social correlation between human labor and the emergence of the commodity in order to re-materialize the commodity as a socio-historically situated object. Harman’s object-oriented analysis implicitly deems the Marxian approach as one which is thoroughly anthropocentric and correlationist in its socio-economic determinism. Harman succinctly summarizes the major tenants of OOO as follows:

The two basic principles of [the] object-oriented approach are as follows: (1) objects have genuine reality at many different scales, not just the smallest, and (2) objects withdraw from all types of relation, whether those of human knowledge or of inanimate causal impact. In short, objects exist at many different levels of complexity, and they are always a hidden surplus deeper than any of the relations into which they might enter. The rest of object-oriented philosophy follows from these two points. (106)

OOO argues for an irreducible gap between data and things, wherein things always withdraw behind the data we gather about them. That is, the phenomena, or data, we receive about a thing, is never reducible to the thing-in-itself. Such a gap, Harman argues, foregrounds the limitations of human knowledge.

For example, when we think of a table, Marx's famous example, it might be understood in two distinct ways: we might reduce the table to its component parts (such as its use-value) or we might understand the table as a "thing" when it acts in conjunction with something else (such as the networks of exchange produced by capitalism). Harman calls the former process "undermining" and the latter process "overmining." The problem with both approaches, Harman argues, is that they fail to account for the way in which objects withdraw from relations as autonomous beings, and that such withdrawal occurs precisely through the tension between the object and the present expression of its qualities. OOO is therefore a critique of anthropocentric orientations toward objects. Harman thus develops a post-anthropocentric approach to objects by de-emphasizing human access as the primary way to know and engage with nonhuman objects. The main difference in Harman's approach is that there is an attempt to re-mystify the object in order to formulate a speculative realism that takes objects as materially and environmentally necessary, precisely because objects have autonomy in addition to their relations with humans and other objects. Put differently, OOO's endgame is to understand objects, in the language of Marx, "as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race" (Marx 233). Harman centralizes the "depth," or withdrawal, of objects as a surplus of being that is not captured through human epistemological systems. That is, the seeming "absence" of an object is actually the most profound expression of its "presence."

Harman's description of the withdrawn quality of objects follows a similar pattern of surface/depth and concealment that is central to Marx's commodity fetishism. For OOO, objects seem to dance with autonomy and agency — much like Marx's things under the spell of commodity fetishism. Harman defines objects as thoroughly autonomous:

Objects will be defined only by their autonomous reality. They must be autonomous in two directions: emerging as something over and above their pieces while partly withholding themselves from relations with other entities. (19)

There are thus a number of important correspondences between Marx and Harman. Firstly, objects in Harman's formulation have emergent properties. For Marx, exchange-value emerges out of the social relations that produce it. For Harman, however, the object's autonomy, or essence, emerges as a withdrawn reality that is more than the sum of its parts. Secondly, in Harman's definition, objects are concealed and thus do not fully present themselves in each instantiation. Similarly, in the fetish analysis, commodities are "social hieroglyphics" which conceal the labor and production needed to produce them rooted in a similar critique of presence. For Marx, commodities only appear to dance and stand on their heads because the labor theory of value withdraws from the commodity's surface. Conversely, the end goal of withdrawal in OOO is to posit an onto-epistemological status of objects that exceeds anthropocentrism and correlationism. That is, objects always have a shadow that can never be fully appropriated by humans, but can instead only be alluded to. By tracing the object's contours, through what Harman calls "allure," we begin to approach the withdrawn and autonomous thing-in-itself. While Harman's *Quadruple Object* never cites Marx, a fascinating structural parallel thus occurs between the fetish analysis and OOO's understanding of the object as never fully present.

As the title of Harman's book, *The Quadruple Object*, suggests, objects have a fourfold structure. Harman describes the fourfold as: natural objects, sensuous objects, sensuous

qualities, and tangible qualities. For Harman, an object is never purified and reduced to one of these poles. Instead, objects are in continuous tension, undergoing what Harman refers to as the “fusion” and “fission” of the different mutations of objects and qualities (102). Rather than these qualities being understood as adversarial, Harman’s position is one of complementarity and supplementarity between objects and qualities. For Harman, the real quality of an object derives from its ability to withdraw, or to become a fetish in Marx’s language. That is, the object conceals itself, only making its withdrawn presence known when it fails or breaks. Such glitches in the use-value of objects reminds us that there is a reservoir of being not accessible or present to us — this is the “withdrawn” nature of the object that Harman borrows from Heidegger. Harman’s instance on the relationship between the natural object and its withdrawn character approaches the object much like Marx approached the commodity. The significant difference is that Harman embraces a Heideggerian attitude of letting the object be in its dwelling, while Marx approaches with a suspicious hermeneutics intent on the demystification of social relations that make the object seem mysterious.

For OOO, sensuous objects are grounded in Husserl’s eidetic analysis of objects, which posits an underlying essence of the object that can only be approached through imperfect means. Harman argues that “the eidetic features of an object can never be made present through the intellect but can only be approached indirectly by way of allusion” (28). Notice that the sensuous object derived through Husserl’s eidetic analysis is also a moment of withdrawal and concealment, requiring what Harman calls “allure” as an indirect appropriation of the sensuous object. In short, Harman’s approach rests upon a critique of presence — the object is always in surplus and shadowy ontological darkness. Timothy Morton, a fellow OOO scholar, summarizes this point well:

To this quite Aristotelian view, OOO extends Husserl’s and Heidegger’s arguments that things have an irreducible dark side...Harman simply extends this irreducible darkness from subject-object relationships to object-object relationships. (165)

Let us take a step back and account for the sensual aspects of Harman’s quadruple objects. Sensuous objects and sensuous qualities for Harman are always radically specific. In OOO, the blackness of a coffee cup is different from the blackness of the night sky or the blackness of pencil lead. Each sensuous quality partakes within the object in a specific and localized manner, as Harman argues: “I never encounter black as an isolated quality, but only as the black of ink or poison, a black infused with the style of these objects” (Harman 77). Harman refers to the “bridge” (77) between the object and its sensuous qualities, implying a unification and focalization of a given sensuous quality within the object. Notice that even the qualities of objects withdraw, and are, in a sense, autonomous with a vibrancy of their own.

Harman thus describes the quadruple object’s breakdown as follows: “time (SO-SQ) as in Husserl’s adumbrations, space (RO-SQ) as in Heidegger’s tool-analysis, essence (RO-RQ) as in Leibniz’s monads, and eidos (SO-RQ) as in Husserl’s eidetic intuition” (99). These are the central tensions that make up the quadruple object, modified from Heidegger’s fourfold, composed of man, divinities, earth, and sky (360) discussed in “Building, Dwelling, Thinking.” However, where Marx’s materiality is social, Harman’s materiality is object-oriented. That is, Harman’s withdrawn object is the exact type of fetishistic mystification Marx works to dispel.

What is essential to notice in this brief overview of Harman's position is how objects are never exhausted in the four tensions of the essence, space, *eidos*, and time. Objects only reveal two of their features in tension with one another, almost as if objects have a Janus face. OOO's insistence on the autonomy of objects is thus built directly into their structure through a robust critique of presence and an emphasis on withdrawal as a means toward autonomy. By rejecting anthropocentrism and correlationism, objects themselves never exhaust one another and never fully experience one another in their relations. As Levi Bryant's provocative title states, OOO ultimately reaches a kind of "democracy of objects" where each thing is autonomously irreducible as an object. Harman uses the metaphor of fire and cotton to exemplify this point. When fire and cotton interact with one another in the act of burning, both are irreducible to one another, even as they seemingly fuse: "Perhaps fire does not think about the cotton that it burns...but the fire still makes indirect contact with the cotton, since direct contact is impossible" (121). Perhaps OOO is thus a kind of secularized mysticism that works to posit the autonomy of objects. We have now arrived at the most important and radical insight of OOO, namely that the Kantian noumena is a fundamental character of all relations (Harman 137). Harman's central claim, of course, stems from classifying the fundamental nature of objects as withdrawn, autonomous, and irreducible to both human and object relations. In this way, Harman and OOO have radicalized the Heideggerian imperative of letting things be in their dwelling by thinking about how objects "dwell" with one another outside the realm of human access.

As is now clear, the Marxian fetish analysis and OOO share the heuristic of surface/depth, but that such a heuristic is mobilized toward radically different political and metaphysical ends. Marx develops a suspicious hermeneutics that demystifies the commodity's "agency" in order to expose the labor theory of value and social relations behind a given object. OOO develops a secularized re-mystification of the object as a social and ontological entity its right. Both, however, are rooted in a critique of presence and employ remarkably similar analytical models to examine the object. This notion leads to a series of questions: is the OOO object a fetish object in the Marxist sense? In other words, does the OOO object actively work to conceal the capitalist modes of production through which it arrives? If this is the case, what is the broader relationship between OOO and capitalism? Conversely, does the Marxian analysis lead to an incomplete consideration of the commodity as a "real" object? Similarly, how might irreducible objects like ecosystems complicate the socio-economically determined framework of commodity fetishism?

What follows are only provisional answers to these important questions. OOO has a notable omission when considered from the Marxian lens — capitalism. Harman's discussion of the quadruple object is rife with actual, produced commodities in addition to imaginary and natural entities. The implicit claim in OOO is that a commodity, such as a computer, has the same withdrawn quadruple structure as a natural object like a tree, or an imaginary object like a unicorn. As OOO insists, it is not that all objects exist equally, but that all are equally objects (5). In OOO, however, objects seem to be unconnected to the historically specific material conditions that brought them into existence. Thus, in conceiving of a computer as a real object, OOO can account for the emergence of the computer as withdrawn and more than a sum of its parts, but cannot account for how the computer arrives through historically specific processes. That is, OOO does not account for the rare earth materials needed for the computer's production, nor the situated

knowledge of human labor required to assemble the computer, nor Apple as a corporate object that disseminates computers across the globe, nor the ecological impact of the energy consumed by such computers. The arrival of the computer in OOO is seemingly one of fetishistic blindness — there is no discussion of the sociopolitical implications of the object's arrival. OOO instead champions the onto-epistemological and the fundamental strangeness of the object over the social and political impacts that such strangeness ushers into the world. Not recognizing the labor power that worked to generate a computer allows consumers to negate responsibility towards the objectified environment and objectified workers who, through their species-being, shaped the computer for commercial exchange and personal use. Thus, reinstalling a sense of “social hieroglyphics” into OOO's construction of the object can help to historicize and politicize the object beyond the radical onto-epistemological stance of autonomy and agency central to object-oriented approaches.

OOO would most likely rebut that including Marx's fetish analysis would inevitably lead back to the correlationist circle. To speak of the object as a commodity, OOO argues, would inevitably require us to speak about its anthropocentric givenness and instrumentalization toward human ends. In my view, at least, the problem with stopping an analysis of objects at their withdrawn ontological autonomy is that such approaches are purposefully blind to the object's troublesome arrival in its historical and sociopolitical vibrancy, and, by extension, to ascribe blame and responsibility for the ecological and social unintended consequences that such objects usher into the world. OOO should thus embrace Marx's fetish analysis in order to account for capitalist modes of production, while not anthropocentrically privileging subject-object relations as the only analytically important perspective. Making the object arrive through Marx's fetish analysis allows part of its withdrawn nature to be disclosed without thereby ignoring the other tensions that work to make an object so much more than simple social and economic relations. To put it differently, OOO can use Marx's fetish analysis as another withdrawn element of the object that comes into tension and presence from different perspectives. In this way, the object arrives, but is never reducible to the commodity or other anthropocentric forms.

Perhaps the accusation above regarding OOO's seeming political blindness concerning capitalism is too heavy-handed. After all, Timothy Morton makes an explicit connection between OOO's object-oriented stance and the ecological crises of the Anthropocene (or, perhaps for our focuses, the Capitalocene). OOO theory argues that recognizing and valuing the withdrawn nature of an object moves objects beyond human utility, and thus allows for ethical and social frameworks that expand the political and the social to include the nonhuman. Such an expanded democracy of objects, Morton argues, is crucial in responding to the proliferation of nonhumans during the age of climate change. That is, to equate objects with human utility presents a mechanistic view of the world that will not allow for a truly political and ethical society that includes nonhumans as autonomous agents (Morton 184). For Timothy Morton, emphasizing the withdrawn in objects allows for a more potent form of ecological thought. Morton argues that “clinging to the palpable, we end up with faceless Nature, a symptom of how thinking has damaged Earth. OOO allows us to think deep down [into] things” (185). While Harman expresses no such ecological thought within *The Quadruple Object*, his teacher, Heidegger, expressed environmental concerns in essays like “The Question Concerning Technology.” For Heidegger, we must become sensitive to the fourfold construction of the thing, through the saving power of art, in order to combat the “enframing” of science and technology. He writes:

Modern technology, as a revealing that orders, is thus no mere human doing. Therefore, one must challenge that man orders the actual as standing-reserve following the way it shows itself. That challenging gathers man into ordering. This gathering concentrate man upon ordering the actual as standing-reserve. (324)

OOO takes up the challenge of Heideggerian “enframing” and works to ecologically “order” the world by granting nonhumans a form of autonomy. To combat “enframing” as a “setting-upon” nature that “orders” the material world into the “standing reserve” of capitalism, OOO presents a new way of “ordering” the world outside of anthropocentric instrumentalization. OOO’s politics seem geared towards ecological insights, which are equally crucial for critiquing of capitalism, even when questions of ontology seem to take precedence over social issues. Synthesizing Marx and Harman allows for a robust framework to understand the social and political contours of nonhuman in the era of climate change, without anthropocentrically reducing objects to their modes of production and social relations.

Of course, the Marxist fetish analysis has been a catalyst for social and political change by exposing and challenging the social and material constructions that codify individuals into particularly harmful institutions and discourses. By challenging the seemingly mystical authority of capital through the fetish analysis, Marx demonstrates that the commodity is neither natural nor essential. The fetish analysis ultimately allows for a critique of larger social structures by demonstrating that what seems natural is instead socially constructed, and is therefore replaceable. As Marx writes in the Theses on Feuerbach: “the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is, to change it” (101). Importantly, the Marxian emphasis on praxis and revolution can benefit OOO attempts to gather political will around environmental issues.

Regarding OOO’s contribution to Marxist suspicious hermeneutics, I take inspiration from Dipesh Chakrabarty’s “The Climate of History: Four Theses.” He writes:

[...] hermeneutics of suspicion [...] is an effective critical tool in dealing with national and global formations of domination. But I do not find it adequate in dealing with the crisis of global warming. First, inchoate figures of us all and other imaginings of humanity invariably haunts our sense of the current [climate] crisis [....] Second, the wall between human and natural history has been breached. (349)

Chakrabarty’s view of suspicion is that it needs to be updated for the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene challenges how we understand humanity as autonomous individuals, and, most importantly as sovereignly removed from nature. I suggest that OOO’s emerging onto-epistemic framework, which emphasizes the withdrawn quality of nonhumans, recognizes the extent to which objects co-constitute human structures (like capitalism) and thus updates the hermeneutics of suspicion for the era of climate change. Specifically, OOO can critically account for nonhuman objects like climate change, energy production, and waste in their material specificity, rather than reducing such objects to socio-economic relations. Marxist suspicious hermeneutics can thus begin to address the contemporary ecological crisis by incorporating OOO’s insistence upon nonhuman autonomy. In sum, Marxism adds to OOO in developing a hermeneutic approach that allows objects to arrive in their specifically situated sociopolitical history. OOO, in turn, acts as a counterbalance to Marx’s fetish analysis by refusing to immediately reduce objects to anthropocentric frameworks. Synthesizing Marxian hermeneutics and OOO epistemologies ultimately

allows for an ontologically capacious political ecology in which more inclusive collectives, politics, and societies of humans and nonhumans may be formed. In short, such a synthesis might be the foundation for a modern political ecology so needed during the era of climate change.

In conclusion, if critics stick with the purely suspicious hermeneutics, then we can never begin to spark a revolution against climate change and the harmful effects of the Anthropocene. Such a failure results precisely because theory will be permanently blinded to the reality and exigency of nonhumans in the era of climate change. Conversely, applying Marxian hermeneutics to OOO allows objects to arrive in their specific socio-historic contexts and thus allows critics to examine issues of power and domination that are central to the withdrawn autonomy of the object. My suggestion follows that of Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*, which argues that becoming attuned to the "thing power of commodities," or the hybrid fusion of ontology and politics, allows critics to examine the natural-cultural reality and exigency of nonhuman things (108). Synthesizing Marxism and OOO, rather than casting them as diametrically opposed theoretical frameworks, contributes to a kind of political ecology that accounts for power and sociopolitical relations of objects, while maintaining the irreducibility of nonhumans as withdrawn objects. Ultimately, the politics of Marx need to be merged with the onto-epistemology of OOO to answer the call of the Anthropocene.

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'Truth' as the Immaterial Essence of Beauty in Tagore's Play *Chitra*

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Abstract: This paper examines Rabindranath Tagore's aestheticism with reference to his play *Chitra* (published 1913). By employing John Keats' concept of 'beauty' as in his couplet: "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'"—that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." (Lines 49-50), from his *Ode to a Grecian Urn*, this paper contends that Rabindranath Tagore in his play *Chitra* averts 'material' existence of beauty as ultimate 'truth'. Rather, he lays emphasis on striving towards what Samuel Taylor Coleridge and his Romantic predecessors called "das Absolute" (Gorodeisky), that is, the beauty we find in truthfulness (Satyam), which lacks materiality. Aarti Devi states: "Tagore seems to follow the base of [Indian] aesthetics known as Satyam [Truth], Shivam [Goodness] and Sundaram [Beautiful]" (Devi 314). In this sense, Tagore in his play sees 'truth' – an immaterial cognizance – rather than materiality, as the essential form of beauty. And in this capacity, his ideas of 'truth' and 'beauty' peculiarly coincide with the idea of the Romantics, especially with that of John Keats. By obviating 'materiality' from truth and beauty, he illustrates the idea of beauty as truth, not bound within materiality, and hence fundamentally aesthetic.

Keywords: Beauty; truth; materiality; immateriality; perception

This paper contends that Rabindranath Tagore in his play *Chitra* discards the idea of materiality (in the Berkeleian sense) in beauty as being 'truth'. The argument of this research rather posits that Tagore averts materiality as associated with beauty and confirms immateriality of beauty as truth in his play. George Berkeley "...holds that there are no such mind-independent things, that, in the famous phrase, *esse est percipi (aut percipere)* — to be is to be perceived (or to perceive)" (Downing). In this sense, every truth established is based in perception. Tagore achieves this feature by providing a humanized picture of the gods, who are otherwise idolized. Through this demonstration he shows that even religion (which is often times considered as materially absolute) is something temporal, and consequently, not the ultimate. His primary aesthetic element in the play is 'truth', which the Romantics called "das Absolute" (Gorodeisky), referring to 'totality'. It appears that if an entity exists, the existence of that entity becomes 'truth', and this 'truth' that the entity exists as it is, is beautiful. The research in this regard employs John Keats' ideology of 'beauty' and 'truth' to explicate the mentioned notion within Tagore's play. Keats states: "'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'"—that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." (lines 49-50). He essentially suggests the primacy of 'truth' over everything, hence, 'truth' being beautiful. This concept of 'truth' is further explained by Francis Herbert Bradley in his *Essays on Truth and Reality* (published 1914), where he positions truth as

the essence of reality (Bradley 113). Taking the idea of essence and correlating it with the Berkeleyian sense, we can gather that 'truth' (Satyam) eludes material existence and, is an abstract reality. In his play *Chitra*, Rabindranath Tagore also elevates 'truth' (Satyam) above all. The play aims at the notion of religion and belief (materiality), humanizes the gods (and their boons) depicted in the play, and by doing so, reverberates material existence of beauty in 'religion'. Materiality renders the existence of entities as temporal (bound to being affected by time). And the play shows that the beauty which emanates from the supposed 'truth' thus becomes an elusive factor in this material religious ideology.

Chitra (the play) relates to John Keats and his poem in question in another significant capacity. The word "Chitra" in Sanskrit stands for "picture" (painted, sculpted, sketched, etc.), and the play, in essence, appears to be a picture painted upon a canvas manifest through its imagery. John Keats' *Ode on a Grecian Urn* also deals with the same mechanism. The poet looks at a picture drawn over an ancient Grecian urn, and feels the mesmerizing captivity of its existence, which appears as if its animate. The people who are illustrated upon the Urn, although being static, seem to be dynamic in their individual actions in a harmonious way. By making the emanating beauty of the urn visible to his readers, Keats points out to an immaterial truth that evades the materiality of the urn. Observable and material entities are beautiful but temporal, while things immaterial are manifestations of truth and, therefore, eternal. *Chitra*, also provides the same imagery of nature, with people, lovers, and their mirth, all that comes together to make what Coleridge calls 'totality' and T.L.S. Sprigge, rephrases as the "unconditioned reality" (Sprigge). Their existence, and their true being presented as it is emanating through, essentially reflects the beauty of this world. Tagore is known widely by many critics to be a Romantic, and therefore, his aestheticism appears intrinsically romantic in nature. Kenneth R. Stunkel attests this statement by saying: "[Rabindranath] Tagore was an intrinsic romantic by temperament" (Stunkel 249).

The play begins with exposition of 'Chitra' (the titular character), a warrior princess of Manipur, conversing with the gods of 'Love' and 'Eternal Youth', "Madana" and "Vasanta", respectively. She enquires the verity of 'Madana' as being the "Lord of love" (Scene I, pp.1). Even though Madana asserts himself as being who she says he is, nevertheless, it cannot be overlooked that the play begins with an enquiry and uncertainty of truth in materiality. It is interesting to note that Tagore, in the beginning of the play, puts forth the genuineness of religion, and the idea of an all-powerful deity, as questionable. Similarly, Chitra questions the second deity, 'Vasanta', who also answers in the affirmative, suggesting the claim of being "Eternal Youth". The freshness of Chitra's youth is complemented in Madana's query, which gives a strong sensuous impression: "Why dost thou wither thy fresh youth with penance and mortification?" This entire conversation between Chitra and the deities establishes the apparent reality. It also established the concept of material existence of beauty and spirit as truth. Madana also asks about her being and her prayer. Upon this query, Chitra introduces herself and that her family, who had been bestowed with a boon from Lord Shiva stated as "an unbroken line of male descent". However, she declares that "the divine word proved powerless...", which again brings in Tagore's implicit idea of religious fallibility and temporality. Upon Madana's enquiry about her prayer, Chitra unfolds her heart's desire to him. She has fallen for the greatest warrior known in her time, 'Arjuna' of the Kuru clan. Her recollection of the route, upon which she first met Arjuna, is described by Tagore with the romantic depiction

of nature as we find in Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats: “a narrow sinuous path”; “entangled boughs”; and “chirping of crickets”. In doing so, Tagore celebrates the existence of these entities and their being as truth, a part of ‘totality’, and therefore emanating the essence of beauty. In a similar capacity, Swati Debnath remarks that “Tagore’s romanticism... [is] the deep understanding of the beauty and wealth of Mother Earth and Nature” (Debnath 46).

Following her confession, Chitra prays to Madana and Vasanta that they may turn her ‘feminine’ i.e., with all embellishments and qualities and appearance traditionally associated with women that she lacks. She abhors her manly attire, that she acquired from her father’s training her as a man, since her childhood. Her impression of beauty correlates with materiality. Everything she sees as beautiful is a corporal embellishment. This conception of hers leads her to believe that Arjuna ignored her, on their first encounter with each other, due to her lack of traditional womanly embellishments. She despises what is her real ‘self’, the immaterial ‘truth’ of her being. She knows that she is a woman, but she asks for the embellishments of the traditional womanly attire that she believes she lacks:

Therefore, I have come to thy door, thou world-vanquishing Love, and thou, Vasanta, youthful Lord of the Seasons, take from my young bong this primal injustice, an unattractive plainness. For a single day make me superbly beautiful, even as beautiful as was the sudden blooming of love in my heart. Give me but one brief day of perfect beauty, and I will answer for the days that follow. (Scene I, pp.9-10)

In these lines, we see Chitra as an individual who detests her true self, her immaterial being and so, despises the ‘truth’ of her existence. In explanation to why Chitra seems to desire such transfiguration in Tagore’s play, Devi writes: “Love to Tagore is libidinal outlook, not an emotional nonsense” (311). She wishes to seduce her desired Arjuna with what she considers “perfect beauty”. She remains oblivious of the worth of her true self. The essence she misperceives is based in the fleshliness of embellishments. Both gods grant her prayer, and that not for a day, but for a whole year “the charm of spring blossoms shall nestle round...[her] limbs”. Her appearance before Arjuna in Scene II is reminiscent of the sensuousness that is most evident in Keats, as Arjuna upon beholding her for the first time (dressed as a woman) says: “...when slowly there came out from the folding darkness of foliage and apparition of beauty in the perfect form of a woman, and stood on a white slab of stone at the water’s brink... she bared her bosom and looked at her arms, so flawlessly modelled, and instinct with an exquisite caress.” (Scene II, pp. 11-12). We see an erotic image of Chitra in her newfangled “perfect beauty” as she is encountered, and so described, by Arjuna. The illusion that Chitra wears is potent enough to seduce a man known for his celibacy that has lasted for twelve years. Arjuna also mistakes the illusion for the “perfect form”, mistakes it for the ‘absolute truth’ (Satyam), and willingly sacrifices his meditation and celibacy. In this context, Aarti Devi inscribes: “Tagore has made the original framework of religious beauty as well as the religious truth through the portraits of women like Chitra” (315). But this does not appear to be the case in the play’s situation. Tagore purposely brings up the idea of ‘illusion’ with the mentioned “perfect beauty”, which Chitra receives from Madana and Vasanta. George Berkeley states that when we individuals perceive the being of external bodies, we “...are all the while only contemplating our own ideas. But the mind taking no notice of itself, is deluded to think it can and doth conceive bodies existing unthought of or without the mind; though at the same time they

are apprehended by or exist in itself" (Downing). Tagore expounds that the beauty she deems "perfect" is merely an illusion immersed in appearance (materiality), and not essentially 'truth'. As both of them converse, she reveals her heart's desire of being with Arjuna, the Kuru. As a result, Arjuna falls for her in the same vein of this misperception.

Tagore's use of Shiva's temple as a meeting place for both of them hold much significance in regard with his sensuousness: "Lord Shiva is the embodiment of the fulfillment of desires" (Devi 314) and his emblem is the 'Lingam' ("Lingam") which signifies the union of male and female genitals. Arjuna calls her "...the goal of all efforts" which echoes the notion of 'das Absolute'. Pain of deceit takes hold of Chitra. David Hume puts this concept in his *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* as follows: "[o]bscurity is painful to the mind as well as to the eye" (7), her mind's obscurity regarding truth and illusion pains her senses, and she tends to stop Arjuna from giving into such falsehood. Nevertheless, both give in eventually, as Chitra says: "take me, take all I am!". Here again, the description of the moment by Chitra shows Tagore's sensuousness at its full: "One curtain of darkness covered all. Heaven and earth, time and space, pleasure and pain, death and life merged together in an unbearable ecstasy" (Scene III, pp.24). It also reflects the Romantic idea of "union of oppositions" ("Samuel Taylor Coleridge") which recurs heavily in Tagore's approach in this play to emphasize the relation between truth and beauty.

It is again the pain of falsehood that snatches the pleasure away from Chitra. She becomes utterly vexed because she is not her 'self'. The true beauty that she had always known in her 'self' (her immaterial beauty) appears to have faded away in and due to the superfluities endowed upon her. Moreover, the contemplation of her guilt, of making Arjuna lose his celibacy to mere deceit, distresses her. Her delight turns into sadness and guilt when she realizes that she has lied to her beloved. She feels such remorse on the thought of being the embodiment of 'lie' by the boon of the gods upon her request. "I found that my body" says Chitra, "had become my own rival. It is my hateful task to deck her every day, to send her to my beloved and see her caressed by him" (Scene III, pp.27). Leading her lover and herself away from 'truth' takes away all pleasure of beauty away from her mind. The thought, of her being an illusion, makes her hate herself as if she were a prostitute to "send her [body] to [her] beloved" and under such realization calls it a "hateful task". She had been so blind to pursue the temporal pleasures that she remains unaware of the truth that lies beyond them. Previously, she had perceived the embellishments of a "womanly" attire as true pleasure. But now, she only feels melancholy. It reiterates the idea that if there is no the truth, there is no pleasure, and so, no true beauty that generates pleasure.

Upon contemplation of her guilt, and the will to tell the truth to her lover pressing her mind, she is tempted by Madana. This particular instance in the play divulges signs of skepticism in Tagore towards religious truth, as he depicts a god encouraging falsehood and deceit: "To snatch away the cup from his lips when he has scarcely drained his first draught of pleasure, would not that be cruel?" (Scene III, pp.27). Temptations to do wrong are customarily associated with the devil, and not deities. Yet, here Madana plays the devil. Vasanta, conversely, contemplates the beauty of truth, expresses that she should not feel dejected, and encourages her to tell the truth about herself to Arjuna; "...the heat-cloyed bloom of the body will droop and Arjuna will gladly accept the abiding fruitful truth in thee". Chitra realizes that beauty is not something one wears as an embellishment. It is rather what Swati Debnath calls "...[a] positive value that is intrinsic" (Debnath 48). Beauty is what dwells within, what is truthful. Vasanta's words show this sensation remarkably.

Chitra is not the only one who experience guilt of self-deception in this play. Arjuna also experiences the same guilt. He fears he has indulged himself so much in mortal pleasures that he has forgotten he is a Kshatriya, a defender. He sanctions his feeling in such words: “My Kshatriya’s right arm, idly occupied...forgets its duties” (Scene VI, pp.35). He has heard the cry of the people, but has not heeded their plea, while he was with Chitra (under guise). His guiltiness tears him apart from within as he has long been away from the truth of what he really is, and has been living a lie (even though for a while). He insists, while talking to Chitra, that he must go hunting, which is the recreation that everyone in his clan practices. Upon insisting, Chitra grants him leave. In this instant, Arjuna also manifests his true beauty that has made Chitra fall for her. It is not Arjuna’s material existence that makes him a desire for many. Rather it is his immaterial valor, his courage and devotion, that in essence is beautiful. But, as he is gone, Chitra again falls under temptation of the illusion of corporal beauty and pleads Madana to let her womanly attire shine to its full, for it is the last night until the boon is annulled, which Madana grants to her. In this situation, her feelings for love’s pleasures take hold of her and she feels overpowered by her libidinal desires.

After taking Chitra’s leave, Arjuna finds some villagers complaining about the robbers that vex and terrorize them, and that their princess Chitra was their only hope against such evils. Upon hearing about the legends of Chitra, the warrior, Arjuna is awe-struck. He cannot help but think about this warrior princess, even though he has seen a “perfect” image of beauty quite recently. This unravels two things: first, that Arjuna’s desire for the girl he has been living with is merely a lustful drive; second, that Chitra’s gamble up till this moment has brought nothing but momentous pleasure and beauty that fades away the next moment. For the problem “arises when we consider a mode without paying attention to its substance” (Arnauld and Nicole 37). Truth in both Berkeleian as well as Keatsian sense is immaterial and thus not bound by the effects of temporal reality. It surpasses time and remains eternally beautiful (Flage). She thought she might win Arjuna’s heart, but instead she had only won his lust for her. This is the same feeling that Chitra expresses earlier upon her contemplation of living a lie, of being nothing but a mere prostitute. Falsehood has evoked displeasure in both of them, as they have not been true to one another. Essentially, with themselves, the joy no longer prevails.

Arjuna, upon his return, is captivated by the idea of “Chitra”, the warrior princess. He craves a mere sight of hers to satiate his desire for the true beauty that he understands. Chitra, however, tries to convince him that the girl he craves for is not beautiful. She projects her own fears onto Arjuna, oblivious of his preferences. Chitra’s distrust in her own true beauty is due to her immersion in and preoccupation with established womanly superficial embellishments. She does not face the fact that she is a warrior, and that is what makes her ‘Chitrangada of Manipur’, the woman who appears to have captivated the mind of Arjuna. Her lack of knowledge about her own ‘self’ had led her to believe that she is not beautiful in her true apparel. Her insecurity is plainly evident in her reply to Arjuna’s fascination with the warrior princess: “Ah, but she is not beautiful. She has no such lovely eyes as mine, dark as death. She can pierce any target she will, but not our hero’s heart” (Scene VIII, pp.45). Nonetheless, Arjuna has caught hold of Chitra’s, what Swati Debnath calls, “intrinsic” beauty (Debnath 48). That beauty which unravels the truth about Chitra, the warrior. Aarti Devi explicates: “Religion creates the true self of the man. Chitra says to Arjuna: “If you allow me to share the great duties of your life,

then you will know my true self” (Devi 315). This statement appears, however, quite off beam. Madana offered ‘illusion’ as a mask for Chitra to hide her true self. And consequently, through Chitra, it sullied Arjuna, a Kshatriya from his duties (Celibacy and Kshatriya oath). Tagore exploits another element of folly in the deities – the lack of aesthetic judgement. If they be omniscient, they should know the true nature of beauty. And, if not halt Chitra, they could have at least provided her with other options. It is rather the pursuit for truth, the Romantic “das Absolute”, that creates harmony in our being. F.E. Sparshott says: “Beauty is relatively stable or real pleasure” (Sparshott, 78). In this sense, it happens to be the stability and prevalence of what is true, the immaterial, that is beautiful in an entity, and not its temporary manifestation. Chitra, the warrior, by mere description of her qualities has been able to captivate the mind of Arjuna. Whereas Chitra’s illusion and contrived ‘self’ has scarcely been able to win his lust. Hence, the immateriality of beauty surpasses its materiality.

Further in the play, we see Arjuna enthralled as he says: “They say that in valor she is a man, and a woman in tenderness” (Scene VIII, pp.45). In this description, Tagore again brings the Romantic concept of ‘union of oppositions’ – combination of manly and womanly attributes. As Coleridge creates “caves of ice” along with a “sunny dome” (lines 36) in his *Kubla Khan*, so Tagore brings, as union, the man/woman dichotomy in a single character, again referring to a truth that is, and cannot be, in no sense entrapped inside material existence of a human body. Arjuna, who had been a slave of his lustful desires previously, is so much transfixed upon the thought of Chitra, the warrior, that he bluntly denies to sleep with his current partner. This indirect encounter with the immaterial ‘truth’ inspires true beauty beneath Arjuna’s lustful exterior. He finally realizes that he is a Kshatriya, and is obliged to perform his duty, come what may. He says: “...permit me for a short while to set about a Kshatriya’s work. With new glory will I ennoble this idle arm, and make of it a pillow more worthy of your head.” (Scene VIII, pp.47). As a Kshatriya, he needs to strive for the prosperity of others. That is what his true ‘self’ insinuates. He seems so eager to learn about this warrior princess, since merely her name has rejuvenated the long-forgotten Kshatriya in him, the truth that has been within him all along. He now strives towards his original ‘self’. Richard Eldridge in expanding upon the idea of truth and beauty quotes Friedrich Hölderlin as follows: “...I am now convinced that the highest act of reason, by encompassing all ideas, is an aesthetic act, and that truth and goodness are siblings only in beauty.” (Eldridge 275). The “act of reason” for Arjuna lies in performing his duty to the people. This is the act that ‘reason’ compels him to commit. Therefore, it is naturally an “aesthetic act” in Friedrich Hölderlin’s sense, an act illustrating true beauty.

On the other hand, Chitra is still under the impression of her embellished “perfect beauty”, and is unable to see lucidly, with reason. She shows her concerns about the warrior princess in these words: “Her womanly love must content itself dressed in rags; beauty is denied her. She is like the spirit of a cheerless morning, sitting upon the stony mountain peak, all her light blotted out by dark clouds” (Scene VIII, pp.48). Her worries about Arjuna witnessing her true self are nothing more than instability of spirit. The “act of reason”, however, demands her to be true to Arjuna, and to herself. She fears her own ‘self’ covered in “dark clouds” that “[blot] all her light”. She feels certain that her newfound womanly attire is the ultimate truth, and believes it to be her true beauty. Chitra’s fallacy is remarkably resounded in John Keats’ *Ode on Melancholy*: “She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die” (Line 21). The superficial beauty that does not even belong to her

is only time-bound. It is a boon of the gods that must perish when its time comes. Even if she had it that fabricated beauty naturally, it would still fade away in time. The only thing that shall always stay with her, and belongs to her in the real sense, is her own true ‘self’. For her, the “act of reason” is in realizing herself as the warrior princess, and not any person’s beloved. This is the “aesthetic act” that Chitra must strive towards in her pursuit for love.

Arjuna, after knowing about the warrior princess, feels the same angst as Chitra endured in her undecidedness upon telling the truth to Arjuna. For Chitra, the disclosure of ‘truth’ made her endure pain, while for Arjuna, the lack of knowledge about the ‘truth’ (not being able to see her) makes him undergo such pain. He says: “I am eager to learn all about her. I am like a traveler come to a strange city at midnight. Domes and towers and garden-trees look vague and shadowy, and the dull moan of the sea comes fitfully through the silence of sleep. Wistfully he waits for the morning to reveal to him all the strange wonders. Oh, tell me her story” (Scene VIII, pp. 49). All nature seems nebulous to him. All those previous nights, when he lied down, he found everything in “perfect beauty” of illusion. But now, he cannot sleep. Only the contemplation of ‘truth’ could quench his burning thirst. His imagination makes him draw wonderful images of the warrior princess. He further states: “I seem to see her, in my mind’s eye, riding on a white horse, proudly holding the reins in her left hand, and in her right a bow, and like the Goddess of Victory dispensing glad hope all round her.” (Scene VIII, pp.49).

He envisions her in splendor and majesty, but still does not see her. As David Hume puts it, Arjuna’s “mind’s eye” (Hume 15) is pained by this obscurity. Chitra, after seeing him in much distress, conjures up courage to tell him the truth. Yet, she feels greatly insecure upon the thought of Arjuna discovering her true ‘self’ and, consequently, neglecting her permanently. She asks herself fearfully that if she might unveil her true ‘self’, will he stay with her even then, or will leave? She states: “I will smilingly pour out for you the wine of pleasure in the cup of this beauteous body” if Arjuna let things be as they are. In a way, these lines reiterate the meaning that Keats delivers in his *Ode to a Nightingale* to remain in his fancy: “That I might drink, and leave the world unseen/ And with thee fade away into the forest dim” (Lines 19-20). She wants him to stay in the illusion he has been in the entire time. Here, it should be noted that she is also oblivious of a one certain ‘truth’ while having knowledge of the other. She is unaware that Arjuna deeply loves the warrior princess. He is yet to witness her, this warrior princess “Chitra”, his love knows no bounds for her regardless. Rabindranath Tagore in his book of lectures, *Personality*, declares: “Those who pursue the knowledge of finite for its own sake cannot find truth. For it is a dead wall obstructing the beyond [knowledge]... This knowledge [the mere finite] accumulates but does not illuminate. It is like a lamp without its light, a violin without its music” (Tagore 56). Chitra has not yet been able to comprehend the fact that what she appears to be in reality is a mere aspect of her complex personality. The physical or material existence she possesses is a mere superficial portion of her profound true self. She has immersed herself so much into religious (and by extension, material) illusion that she has forgotten what lies within and beyond her exterior, the immaterial truth. Her “mere finite” knowledge, as Tagore puts it, about herself is the prime illusion, which clutches her mind and hinders it from seeing beyond.

Arjuna is perplexed upon hearing that she has something hidden beneath the surface. He states that his love is imperfect and without any meaning, if such might be the case. Yet, he is prepared to see her pulling off the veil of illusion and show her “naked dignity”.

The use of this expression paints an image, which marks the “aesthetic act” in embodiment. Nakedness is a source of shame and disrespect in traditional thought, especially in the religious sense. Predominantly, religion comes up with the idea that clothing is a mark that provides respect. By using the expression “naked dignity”, Tagore further challenges the established religious norms. He does not find dignity in artificiality, but in nature. And through Tagore, Arjuna desires this “bare simplicity of truth”. He craves the truth, considering that now he discerns that true beauty lies only in ‘truth’. The truth he longs for can be understood in the words of Matthew Arnold: “Ah, love, let us be true/To one another!” (*Dover Beach*, Lines 30-31). The message that Arnold puts forth is of ‘humanity’. He is pained by the thought of lies that preoccupied his mind. Therefore, Arnold addresses all humans as “love” and appeals to them to be truthful to one another. Only then, according to Arnold, could we see the true beauty that lies ahead of us.

Since Arjuna constantly requests her to unveil the truth, Chitra unveils her original “male-like” attire and states: “The gift that I proudly bring you is the heart of a woman. Here have all pains and joys gathered, the hopes and fears and shames of a daughter of the dust; here love springs up struggling toward immortal life. Herein lies an imperfection which yet is noble and grand. If the flower service is finished, my master, accept this as your servant for the days to come!” (Scene IX, pp.56). For the first time, Chitra bravely brings up the truth before Arjuna. She narrates to him the entire truth about herself and the land where she come from. She also discloses the secret of the boon she had received from Madana, the god of love. She proudly wears her warrior’s attire, and tells Arjuna that she will bear him a son and teach him to become another Arjuna. She desperately tells him: “I can only offer you Chitra, the daughter of a king.” Arjuna, upon hearing the truth, is filled with an unfathomable joy. A joy that only truth can provide. In relation to ‘truth’ which is one with ‘beauty’, Keats also states in *Endymion: A Poetic Romance* (Book 1): “A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:/Its loveliness increases; it will never/Pass into nothingness;” (Lines 1-3). In this sense, we witness Arjuna being released from his misery as he now knows the warrior princess of his dreams to be none other than his own beloved. And finally, after he has learnt the ‘truth’ about her, Arjuna states: “Beloved, my life is full.” (Scene IX, pp.58).

Thus, the idea of ‘truth’ and ‘beauty’ being one in the ‘immaterial’ sense (as put forth by John Keats and George Berkeley), resonates throughout the play *Chitra*. Tagore, through the imagery of a forest and two lovers, delivers a message of love through truth in humanity beyond physical existence. As Keats sees the two eternal lovers depicted upon the Grecian urn, Tagore puts forth his “Chitra” (picture) with the idea of love for truth, and love for the essentially beautiful. His picture also presents the truth about human life, and how in search of the ‘idealized self’, we forget our ‘true self’. A person “...deserves to be loved not because [they are] beautiful, gracious or good but because of [their] existence, and that is the truth.” (Debnath 53). In his “Chitra”, Tagore also portrays nature and man in harmony. Through the play, comes forth this rule upon which the ideas of ‘truth’ and ‘beauty’ operate. Religion is cultural product, and culture is temporal, subject to question and potential negation. Matthew Arnold in his essay *The Study of Poetry* states: “There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve” (Greenblatt, Stephen, and Carol T. Christ, eds., p. 1404). This notion, that Arnold puts forth, coincides with the message that Rabindranath Tagore’s *Chitra*, which, by

humanizing deities, discards the idea of an "absolute religious materialism", and encourages humanity to live in truth, peace, and harmony. Beauty can be found only in truth, which lies within each entity, and not without.

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Towards Poetic Justice: (Im)material Antiquity in the Works of Albery Allson Whitman

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Two things are acknowledged to be sensible for most, which alter human behavior: origin and land. There are also two, which have been deemed injurious, plus conflicting with the nature of being: a severed world and egotism to some stake in a woman's affections. Still, however, the hue of such deed, bearing upon it the flecks of unsuitableness along with erroneous action, is transformed when the writing of providence becomes traced in its origin. It is essential to stifle some irritation with form in composition, when the code of a writer, unlocking the chance of mixed results, has still through the agency of fortune been the event to some unexpected benefit. This instance was the case with Albery Allson Whitman, whose sociopolitical high verse and epic poems show his insistency on solvency between being and origin.

Among Albery Whitman's five poetry books are his *Leelah Misled* (1873), 118-stanza poem; *Not a Man, and Yet a Man* (1877), 197-page narrative poem; *The Rape of Florida* (1884, reprinted as *Twasinta's Seminoles*, 1885), comprising 251 Spenserian stanzas; *The World's Fair Poem* (1893), comprising two poems; and *An Idyl of the South: An Epic Poem in Two Parts* (1901), another narrative poem, often cited as his finest work.¹ Hereafter, I explore two leading works, *The Rape of Florida, or Twasintas's Seminoles* (1884), and *Not a Man, and Yet a Man* (1877), based on the Blackhawk War (1830-1832), of a former Hart County, Kentucky captive of the Green River Plantation.² He used introductory passages, dedications, narratives, and digressions from his tales to convey thoughts echoed by other Black people in the religious pulpit and print media, lecture, and caucus hall.

Like most Americans, during the nineteenth century, Whitman's existence was enmeshed in the materiality of captivity. As Emerson writes in his address on the Fugitive Slave Law, captivity had veered most dinner tables into a debating club and most inhabitants into investigators of natural law. Before these happenings, American captivity formulated Whitman's existence in explicit and subtle aspects. Through the Fugitive Slave Act, captivity enhanced the ownership of American captors to declare their possession two years before taking over parliament funds to send the USS *Mississippi* into the Pacific. The Northern industrialists who would eventually profit from the Fugitive Slave Law needed further exchange routes across the Pacific, which compelled the opening of Japan.³

I explore his epics through emblematic vernacular notions passed down through philosophical ancientness with literature, pulling firm on the scholarship of literary masterworks and philology. I further discuss that Whitman offers, through a decolonial lens, works with a normative world-making conception that confirms some ideas of what becomes regarded as mutually restricted under colonialism together with its effects. Such

restricted matters are African American/Black and Native American presence; gender, Diaspora, colonialist tongues; and the worldly plus a bit of (im)material. The bond between some immaterial and physical realm is an inter-comparative paradigm central to an insight of opening these texts as a penetrating theme that makes fragrant the world with a mandate of recognition.

This affair becomes glimpsed from three perspectives: there is an ontological case about how beings belonging to/being the property of various ethnical classifications can causally interact, an epistemic question about the illustrative degree of (im)material causal methods, plus a dilemma about some power of philology to relate to and affect spatial/non-spatial beings. I also argue that the current climate of the unexpected post-Reconstruction juncture is a complex dialectical bond of spectacle and tension. In other words, I assert that the artistic production of the post-Reconstruction period is depicted, on the one hand, by an intense depiction of suffering and corruption but, on the other, by a severe engagement with issues about the fate of civilization, politics, and morality. The combination of poetry and prose alters the way the reader interacts with the work. Whitman uses the page as a new space upon which his individuality can be assembled. For the orator must willingly move toward the reader, the other, and share his defenselessness with the likelihood of being opposed. Furthermore, the dialect with which two groups once were in discourse in the language of unrest thus, the ousted must find a new wording, new phrases, to convey a position. Poetry transcends historical supremacy of one denomination over another, for it enables a new path through which one can communicate that which was not articulated prior. The dialect that is often used by those who write in and about exile is poetry, for poetry enables them to break down the possession over narrative and history allotted to the cognitive division of terms, and one must wager forth by reading/listening to what is not presentable under the restrictions of understanding.

James Hays explains in "Albery Allson Whitman (1851-1901), Epic Poet of African American and Native American Self-Determination" that as the first Black poet to use the Spenserian stanza in a poem of epic length, he attempted this form of imperial verse "mastered only by Spenser, Byron, and a very few other great poets" (*Rape of Florida*). Whitman said, seeing "some [Black person] is sure to do everything that anyone else has ever done, and as none of that race [has] ever executed a poem in the stately verse, I simply venture in" (*Rape of Florida*). In his second volume, *The Rape of Florida*, through 257 Spenserian stanzas, he regulates the demanding rhyme scheme with repose, but Hays also claims Whitman's Alexandrines frequently drag along like Alexander Pope's verses. Whitman's historic poem *Not a Man, and Yet a Man* of nearly 5000 lines comprised pentameter couplets, trimeters, unrhymed trochaic tetrameter, tetrameter couplets, and unrhymed hexameter and heptameter. The 145-line Prologue of *Not a Man* is a poetic discourse on liberty's historical development and the Black American's birthright to experience freedom. Whitman declares that ever since the Hebrews' deliverance, the notion of God and independence has proliferated throughout the world.

Of Whitman's work, some have described it as technically ineffective and diffuse, tarnished by lenient versification, awkward transitions in wording, overblown verbiage, and preachy tangents, but he still had a profound talent for affected intellect; for gripping description, romantic narration, the account of tragedy, plus causticness; a wide range of foci; and, the valor to engage diverse along with rugged meters and rhyme schemes in

epic-length poems, fitting his structure to fluctuating tempers with wits. Of Whitman, Reverdy C. Ransom, African Methodist Episcopal (AME) bishop and civil rights leader, wrote, “This man, I think, was lonely. There were few among us with whom he could have [a] communion of mind and spirit” (*The Pilgrimage of Harriet Ransom’s Son* [1949]: 64).⁴ In his first significant digression, Whitman condemns Memphis, “the pride of the South,” as the site of inane materialism and immorality, promoting slavery, transgression, warfare, starvation, and illiteracy. Conflicted with what W.E.B. DuBois in *Black Reconstruction* claimed Thaddeus Stevens’ (a white Radical Republican congressman from Pennsylvania) plans to redistribute the assets of the farmer class was the federal dispossession of Native land and its sale to white settlers and railroad corporations via the Homestead Acts in 1862 and 1866. This plan was to divide Southern territory along the coastline between Florida and South Carolina among freed people in parcels of 40 acres. DuBois felt that Northerners did not take this plan seriously enough, which led to a counter-revolution of property. The federal ruling to hurry the drilling on public lands is redolent of the federal government’s vast land gifts to railway corporations as an enticement for constructing the Transcontinental Railway in the 1860s. In the late 1920s, Vernon Parrington called the Gilded Age phenomenon of the 1870’s the Great Barbecue, in which the powers that be did not invite African Americans/Black people and Native Americans to the cookout ritual.⁵

In 1888, Albery A. Whitman, described as the “gifted” orator, poet, and preacher, was an alternate delegate-at-large from Kansas at the national convention in Chicago. He transitioned from a republican to a democrat in pursuit of “pure politics” and “good government” for democracy.⁶ George Marion McClellan, a slightly younger black poet (1860-1934), assessed some poetry of Black/African American people in an article “The Negro as a Writer” in *Twentieth Century Negro Literature*, a 1912 compendium edited by Daniel W. Culp, which addressed Black literature in some context of the pressing issues of the day: “It remains true, however, that he was worthy of a much better place than is accorded him as a [Black] poet, and it is to be regretted that his work is so little known among us” (Culp 279-80).⁷

The Rape of Florida or Twasinta’s Seminoles is a historical romance tale based on the First and Second Seminole Wars. The U. S. Army pursued annihilating an alliance of Seminole Indians and African Americans, many of whom were runaway captives with their Maroon children. The name Twasinta is a fictitious reference to both some native land of some people in this narrative and some people themselves. They are indigenous neighbors of some Seminoles. The hero, Atlassa, and others were primarily loyal to Florida and secondarily to Spain. The three nineteenth-century Seminole Indian Wars (1816-1858) were the second major series of battles in the long-standing struggle—since colonial times—between some indigenous peoples of North America and European settlers. Florida, the site of colonial battles mainly between Britain and Spain throughout the eighteenth century, was regulated by Spain after the U.S. Revolutionary War for Independence. By the treaty between Spain and the United States, Florida became a U.S. territory in 1821. Some multiethnic Spanish Florida peoples are represented here by Twasinta; Palmecho, a Spaniard; Ewald, Palmecho’s daughter with a Maroon woman; Atlassa, a Seminole, plus Mickasuki, the Muskogee. Some Seminoles lived on the land in present-day Florida. While Spain occupied Florida, Seminole land became a refuge for Black fugitivity.

The legendary Twasinta bands of Indians were strongly affected by some Spanish. They also intermarried with Maroons. In this tale, some Seminoles, Muskogee, and other native peoples eventually lost their land and conceded to enabling slavery among their peoples after Spain relinquished Florida to the United States in 1819, which took effect two years later. They were forced from their land in 1830 after Andrew Jackson betrayed the Muskogean people. Soldiers from the U.S. military captured a leader of Florida's people, but he breaks out and reunites with them and becomes a leader of some exiled people on the Trail of Tears (1831-1833). Some will settle in the so-called Indian Territory; others travel as far as Mexico to establish their settlements. Of some Black people in the Florida Indian region, some vastly significant faction was those with a perceived status of importance in the Seminole tribe. A few of these people existed as legal slaves of some Indians, with an actual lesser amount existing as lawfully autonomous; some considerable majorities were runaway or "captured" Black people and their children, all of whom were thus legally the capital of white denizens.⁹

Moreover, there were free Black people among some Seminoles, plus there were also Seminole slavers and Seminole bounty hunters that enslaved Africans too. These occurrences are as complicated as the Creek's history with Africans and slavery. However, President Andrew Jackson's Major-in-Charge, General Thomas Sidney Jesup, who was in authority in Florida during its considerably critical moment, declared openly in 1836, "This ... is a negro, not an Indian war." The General doubled down on his conviction that if the war were "not speedily put down, the south would feel the effects of it on their slave population before the end of the next season," or in other words, that a widespread captive-as-slave coup might occur.¹⁰

In Whitman's epics of frontier history, he lays, what Matt Sandler (2020) refers to as, Jacksonian historical subjects and antiquated poetic forms to the provision of an aesthetic evaluation of colonization, discrimination, and capitalism.¹¹ Although this notion Sandler argues is complicated considering Jacksonian ethics mostly only applied to white men. Sandler's claim is an overreckoning of the universalism of President Jackson's politics that Whitman sought to dismantle through aesthetic fugitivity. In this way, fugitivity is intrinsic to the grind of being Black but is evident transversally.¹² Whitman, too, uses poetry as an expansion of radical eradication. As a Black Romantic poet and African Methodist Episcopal Church minister consumed in post-Reconstruction Black community-building across the South and Midwest, his poetry worked through the cultural (ab)norms of American frontier life and settler colonialism paradoxes. This notion is analogous to the practice of Alexis Pauline Gumbs in *M Archive* where modern (im)materialism clashes with the virtually unimaginable descent of life left in the trace of capitalism. Likewise, this same practice may be seen in *Maroon Choreography* by Fahima Ife; in narrative poems and essays they speculate on the (im)material, ecological, and aesthetic afterlives of Black fugitivity. At the core of art and spiritual genius across myriad communities and nations, this creative impetus affirms portals that shroud space, eternity, and some beaming matrix of existence.

Florida's despoliation is indeed a reference to some systemic process of force and bloodshed by white Americans to remove or destroy Native Americans and African Americans. On another level, the *Rape of Florida* is about some Maroons and Black/African American people who fought for individual freedom in the Seminole War. In *The Idea of Florida in the American Literary Imagination*, Anne E. Rowe provides

an informative discussion of A. A. Whitman's *Rape of Florida* (1865), whose epic "transformed the eviction of the Seminoles from Florida into an allegory of the pillaging of the New World" (20). Through body (material) with the mind (immaterial), they slid into Florida and ravaged a social construct of force. It is, perhaps, through contact with the erotic that the world becomes created. This sensuous manifestation is some potential for a new, more complex awareness of an ability to transform the material world. The body becomes enlightened by a lineage that conforms to materialize the immaterial. Thus, a body turns into a favored agency for envisioning the abstract and the innermost parts; it may convey itself to sensuous manifestation. That which lacks sensual manifestation may well exist as able to define without itself being definable. Some elements become generated in the continual performing out of this paradoxical link of awareness and visibility. And so, it goes in Whitman's tale, one night, a man infiltrated Ewald's (Palmecho's daughter with a Maroon woman) cell to rape her. He hounded her, and she eluded him for a time until "with brute force" he readied to grab her.

One pleading look to heav'n she wildly throws,
And sinks upon her couch still mutt'ring prayers;
Then like a flying fury at him goes,
Flings wide her prison door and publishes her woes! (RF 64)

She broke out, "saved from shame," and returned to Twasinta. There she found out that her father, Palmeche, had been caught and punished to be hanged for the killing of three guards killed when the Seminoles rescued him: "doomed to die for shedding human blood, He who has never caused a mortal pain" (RF 64). To plead for his life, Ewald surrenders. Thus, Ewald's body becomes the means for freedom for her father and tribe, but her body also becomes the site and metaphorical point at which her tribe becomes pillaged.

Since antiquity, carnal pillaging as a literary technique becomes deployed to paint a vivid image and project a maimed view of the power of force—some power of assault on mind together with a body—like the rape of Medusa in the temple of Athens. These representative female bodies are yet all around like the Statue of Liberty, Lady Justice, and Mother Earth, Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1712), or the second of William Shakespeare's poems written as a minor epic in the 16th century, *The Rape of Lucrece*.¹³ "The Rape of Europa" has been dated to the early 1640s during the years Vouet was in Paris between 1627 and 1649. Even in the bible, the rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1–22) or Dinah (Genesis 34) are events of tragedy to read. This account of Whitman's poetic justice, even at the expense and injustice of women and others, creates a space to infer the reconciliation of philosophical coding in the poetics. In this space of tradition, along with being a dilemma emerges to negate the female seemingly placed on a pedestal as central to Whitman's creationist vision.

Using an allegorical lady symbol, the portrayal of rape no longer embodies the female's suffering but the vaster deterioration of the American legal structure plus the moral insolvency of colonialism. Material metaphors symbolize junctures in Whitman's *The Rape of Florida*, and *Not a Man, and Yet a Man* when the portrayal or indication of rape reveals some material purpose of these epics, the agency. In other words, some subject of reading turns into the object of reading as well. Thus, the medium also serves as the message. Rape, therefore, also persists as a site of personal disruption that a systemic framework cannot entirely understand. Such a political or descriptive technique

performs more omission and unrest, stirring the initial site of trauma. Rape is, therefore, ever, plus never structural, at one time and impossibly a metaphor for other chaos. It is an epiphenomenon, philosophically; or, an effect of central phenomena but cannot affect preliminary phenomenon. As in, rape arises from colonialism but cannot embody the notion.¹⁴

Not a Man, and Yet a Man concerns Rodney, a twenty-year-old guy with old classic heroic virtues. Though “eighty-five percent Saxon,” Rodney is a slave in Saville, a border Illinois village before the Civil War. Counter-balanced with Seville is the Indian Sac Village, where Chief Pashepaho, his daughter Nanawawa, and their tribe live, ideally, in harmony with nature. In the subplot, Nanawawa, though courted by many suitors, merges with a young white captive, and Chief Pashepaho dies. At this point, the underlying vileness in the white town spirals to life. Hunters from Saville, led by Sir Maxey, loot an Indian village, and later one of them shoots Nanawawa. Indian warriors find her body, hound the murderers, and massacre all of them except Sir Maxey, whose horse saves him. Coming upon Rodney in the woods, Sir Maxey urges them to escape, but Rodney scolds his cowardly slave owner, and he singlehandedly dominates the men who attack him.

Eventually, Rodney becomes the captive of Mosher Aylor in Florida. The protagonist falls in love with a beautiful young Creole captive called Leeona, whom Aylor craves to “proffer her a master’s secret love” (*NM* 153). When Aylor discovers the lovers meeting at night, he becomes jealous and imprisons Rodney. With Leeona’s help, Rodney flees, taking haven in a wooded cave. Later, while hiding in the “boughs” allowing his eyes “to take their feast of gaze” on Leeona’s beauty first, eventually:

[A]s the fingers of a dream have caught
 The waving pinions of her free young thought,
 She hears his steps, sleep blends them with her dream,
 Till touch’d, she wakes and bounds up with a scream.
 She screams for aid, till screaming makes her hoarse.
 He grows more furious as she him defies;
 The helpless lamb to flee the lion tries,
 But fear o’ertakes her strength, and daunts her soul,
 Her senses reel, and reason yields control
 To blank unconsciousness, and what ensues,
 Refrain to ask, Oh! man, withhold my muse! (*NM* 153)

The licentious Aylor “filled with blasty lusts” rapes Leeona, and afterward, she bears a child (*NM* 153). Rodney, grief-stricken by ambiguity, makes his way to Leeona at dusk, and the lovers promise to pursue liberty. While Leeona escapes with her infant, Rodney kills the men and dogs hounding her. He then returns to her in the woodland. After months of journeying, Rodney and Leeona make their way to Sussex Vale, Canada, where they marry and live happily among a host of warm friends. Sometime later, curiously, Rodney encounters a dying Confederate soldier Mosher Aylor. With his last words, Aylor begs God for mercy, declares his sins, and pleads for Rodney and Leeona to forgive him.

What becomes overlooked is that Whitman may have accentuated the high verse structure with codes of Black dialect that do not always fit into the Spenserian stanza structure. For instance, after he describes the assault of Leeona by Aylor in “The Flight

of Leeona” upon exclaiming, “Oh! *man*, withhold my muse!” (my emphasis; 153), Whitman sometimes interjects with slight digression of Black vernacular narrated into high verse structure. While some scholars have harshly criticized this as a lack, it is an event of evolution and embodiment of negating the rigidity of imperial prose. Whitman added a sense of joy, racial pride, and delicate awareness of collective matters, movingly customized to these poetic abilities.¹⁵ In “The Flight of Leeona,” readers are first introduced to her:

In bloom gemm’d depths, where Sylvan branches meet
Above dim paths, that thread a still retreat;
Where light on tip-toe shy, steals o’er your path,
Like some chaste maid unrobing at the bath (153)

From the onset, readers see Leeona in a garden-like paradise of “Sylvan branches,” evoking the Aristotelian illustration of *hyle* and *telos*.¹⁶ The trees on this “dim path” exemplar nonhuman communication networks. In this way, the “chaste maid” defines sylvan rhetoric as illustrating roots and “branches” of new materialist and more-than-human rhetorical theory. Despite the later rape and objectification of her as less-than-human, the dichotomy presents an intriguing space to reconcile the poetic tragedy of objectification parallel to the realism of objectified bodies in literature and reality. Furthermore, she embodies characteristics of Mother Earth to accentuate her beauty, ripe suppleness, and body:

Leeona’s long locks round her slim waist meet,
The bright waves leap and sigh to kiss her feet,
While her reluctant breasts to view disclose
The lovely hues of life’s serenest rose;
And timid rising, like twin moons do seem (*NM* 153)

Her hair near her “slim waist” already sets up readers to pay attention to her body and her aesthetic appeal. She becomes more than a woman—more than human— or some representation of Mother Earth, as sand near an ocean shore as “bright waves” move near and moans “to kiss her feet,” and her “reluctant breasts” seem “like twin moons” (*Not a Man, and Yet a Man*). The dynamic, contrasting movement of her breasts rising as she breathes accompanied by a metaphorical variation—the clear-sounding; beautiful; divine waves, serene youth, the supple, curving female form—and their psychological description conveyed by gesture along with pose timidly rising. The drama of the movement becomes heightened using her body in which the upper and lower parts of the body represent the earth (feet as sand) and the universe (breasts as twin moons) in opposite directions, encouraging the viewer/reader to see her all-around from all points of view. This doubling of woman-as-Earth and woman-as-muse demonstrates Albery Whitman’s use of a body to foretell the enforced ravishment of that body—of that earthly and spiritual space. Meanwhile, “Low Aylor” keeps looking at her through the “boughs” as “Lust heaves his bosom and compels his breath” (153). As she lives and breathes in paradise, like Eve, in the Garden of Eden, timidly so, Aylor, like a serpent demon, coils behind a tree while he ruminates in uncertainty to “nearer steal, but then she might awake!” (153).

In *The Rape of Florida* and *Not a Man, and Yet a Man*, a woman becomes hidden by this broader analogy of forced penetration. These symbols of an offense are not about an assault at all. They only utilize rape to symbolize deeper sin. The injury of solitary

women becomes not more than a tool. This occurrence further perpetuates a female body used as some device for economic stimuli, like captivity. Since penetrating some areas of being in literature are often portrayed centrally as penetrating a body of female literary figures, this writing method grants access to antiquity philologically. When using a body as an orifice for dispelling germination of seeds, a space of that womblike realm becomes a destruction and renewal site. A matrixial substance of being stands as the object of an artifact to populate a tale and (re)populate a mind as materializing a/n (im)material trauma of rape—as a poetic tragedy. One of the main theoretical guiding influences in the emergence of ecofeminism in the 1980s is the “rape of the land” model. In essence, ecofeminists contended that some root of modern ecological troubles lay in a patriarchal civilization. The recognition that nature was also in this group was the work of early ecofeminists like Susan Griffin, Toni Morrison, and Carolyn Merchant. The idea that a patriarchal society could “rape the land” stemmed from two theories: (a) that it is the nature of a patriarchal society to dominate and control entities that fall outside of established rules of culture; and (b) that women could reclaim imagery of the goddess in nature (or, Mother Earth) as a source of embodiment and power.

The work on embodiment within the phenomenological framework clarifies the extent to which an embodied identity is dependent on some response of another. It becomes conveyed intersubjectively, related to some viable form of social interactions within which one can noticeably locate. It is also evident that some form of embodiment that remains normatively connected to specific corporeal morphologies or syntactical structures can become limited along with detrimental. Toni Morrison, Judith Butler, and Frantz Fanon described the adverse effects of encountering the illusions and descriptions (metaphors) borne by women and Black/Brown beings (or bodies), which may become internalized to resolve an embodied sense of self. One’s fleshly openness, together with one’s susceptibility to others, is also essential to consider. Through the body, one becomes exposed to some material world and to some brutality that may be perpetrated on persons by others. The susceptibility to collective abuses and some violent behavior risks add mainly to those who neglect to agree to societal (ab)norms. According to Sara Suleri, the trope of colonialism as rape “in which colonized territory is rendered dubiously coterminous with the stereotype of a precultural and female geography” no longer remains “culturally liberating” in part because this metaphor obscures “the anxieties of empire” (16). However, Butler emphasizes the exposure plus instability of everyone’s subjectivity, established by civic systems of signifying, which are also unstable and traversed by disparities. One becomes affected by the outer, the collective, and familial ties, which empower one to presume subjectivity and agency but are also harmful to one in sealing opportunities for some way of being.

In another vein, *The Rape of Florida* (RF) (1884) involves African Americans and Native Americans, both subject to some linguistic plus material practices of non-colored Others, wrestling with existing within and without those imposed structures of being. This event arose in some reconciliation of language with some material realm, which lingered beyond Albery Whitman or Edmund Spenser’s knowledge. From Spenser’s self-identified exile in Ireland to some influence his epic tale *The Faerie Queene* had on the language used for the King James Version of the Bible, to some philological effect present in Albery Whitman’s epic adventure, *The Rape of Florida* is evidence of some power movement of language style has on literature.¹⁷ This effect of linguistic occurrences

leaves traces of inherited transnationality present in most authors' works. Spenser's poetics indicated a probable basis of his doubts about some place of the verse in a culture dependent upon unique discourse but stalled by an underlying language limitation. Spenser's labor on dialect is not just a circumstance of idealism and configuration; it has political along with civic contexts. It is a topic of valuable and harmful patterns linked to exceptional plus disastrous material verities.

I focus on Spenser's craft next to highlight some influences on Albery Whitman. Spenser wrote the poem during a transitional period from Middle English to Early English. During the transition, some dialects spoken in England include Welsh, spoken in Wales, and Cornish, spoken in Cornwall. It is essential to understand Middle English for this epic seeing traces of Middle English features and literacy techniques throughout the story. There was also some development of religious and academic verse in Morality plays. Some main characters become personified abstractions like Good Deeds or Friendship, such as *Everyman* (1505). Whitman uses this same concept as Rodney and his other heroes embody noble and chivalrous qualities. It is also important to remember that Latin remained the language of serious literature when Spenser was alive. There was debate as to whether English would be a dominant language moving forward. Thus, Spenser wrote in English to protect the Elizabethan church's national and moral purity with English tradition. One consequence of the Reformation was the separation of Protestants from the Roman Catholic Church. There were religious and political disputes in which each group looked to the medieval church for historical evidence to support their arguments. This discourse led to an interest in old English plus classical learning, which led to Plutarch, Virgil, Plato, and Homer's English translations. That conscious desire to produce national literature in England led to epics like *The Faerie Queene*.

Book III of *Faerie Queene* contains some philosophical core of the epic poem, meant for reading in private spaces; namely, grace, temporality, and plutonic love unifies the universe with people through virtuous actions returning to God at last in worship. This idea is similar to Aylor in Whitman's *Not a Man* as he finally admits his sins to Rodney and begs for forgiveness from Leona and mercy from God. The heroine of Book III, Britomart, is the daughter of King Ryence of Britain and the lady knight of chastity. She is the most powerful of several types of Queen Elizabeth in the poem. The book of chastity generates a made-up female body that resists penetration, like Ewald in *Rape of Florida*; thus, Elizabeth's famed historical discursive depictions of her impervious body becomes represented as Britomart in the story. For instance, to give virtuous longing a body within a poetics of the dialogue, earlier in Britomart's quest, Spenser will negate forms of identity to produce a feminine bias positioned on some virtue of chastity. However, these identifications produce erotic opportunities which do not lead to marriage. Britomart's friendships become antagonistic, and her identifications become a state of low spirits caused by loss of hope, such that her quest as some personification of chaste desire ends with her "hacking" and cutting Radigund's "dainty parts," a synecdoche for female sexuality.

It is these seemingly immaterial abstractions that establish some matter of poetics. For instance, the only reference to Albery Whitman and the Seminole connection is a note in his epic of "a meeting with a Seminole chief" (Hays 11). Poetic writing embodies a strategy of event and grasps an unfolding structure that cannot be recognized beforehand. Seeing the world of happenings is a realm of change. This Kantian aesthetic understanding in

which nature, through some intellectual process, specifies some rule, not science but composition. Captured structures indicated only through event would infringe some epistemology of existence in a Kantian equation of nature, ever-present in a sense, with an all-encompassing principle of knowledge seeing nature already resides within the psyche. How small-minded to think the universe may be contained in this linguistic form shaped by gender and constructs of time. The purpose must grant evaluation and awareness. On the other hand, Albery Whitman performs the author function the way John Milton recreated material heaven and hell from the immaterial of mind, that is, imagination presupposed to matter—as God. If all that exists is a matter in its movement assemblages, how does the poetic mind establish a space that prior did not live? Whitman offers an answer to this question in CANTO I, the INVOCATION I:

The poet hath a realm within, and throne,
And in his own soul, singeth his lament.
A comer often in the world unknown —
A flaming minister to mortals sent;
In an apocalypse of sentiment,
He shows in colors true the right or wrong,
And lights the soul of virtue with content;
Oh! could the world without him please us long!
What truth is there that lives and does not live in song? (RF8)

The Dedication of Whitman's work conveys his faith in Black people to overcome some materialist nature of imperial sovereignty, declaring "whining Petition and complaint are the language of imbecility and cowardice," "*Goody Goodness* is a sort of man worship: ignorance is its inspiration; fear its ministering spirit, and beggary its inheritance" (*Rape of Florida* 3-4). Albery Whitman calls for a strong sense of self-reliance, adamant resistance to oppression, and belief in some signs of oneself as Spirit, as immaterial, and some universal quality of subjective personality. He relates, therefore, to his own life:

I was in bondage—I never was a slave—the infamous laws of a savage despotism took my substance—what of that? [...] Adversity is the school of heroism, endurance, the majesty of man, and hope, the torch of high aspirations. (*Rape of Florida*, p. 4; repeated in II, xi)

Whitman never did believe slavery was a state of mind that could not be overcome. He separated his body, as captive, from his mind, to conceive of and create realms. He thought what from the "savage" does he owe to grant power to "despotism" over his material substance. Laws of matter produce within being plus social (ab)norms an immaterial effect on some embodied host's spirit. This material restriction on freedom begets immaterial bondage. Whitman sought to dismantle this spiritual captivity by depicting poetics' bodily experience to address some (im)material facet of a body of color and "those who deem themselves superior-born" (RF II, VII).

Poets such as Edmund Spenser, John Milton, and Albery Whitman took on some daunting undertaking of mediating their notions of imagination with their convictions about the world's material configuration plus the universe around them. They carved out some space between a platonic aesthetic along with materialist physiology. For instance, historical analysis shows Foucault (1994) looked at how subjectivity becomes performed in and by a body.¹⁸ Others, such as Leibniz, propose one considers a body entirely as an ambassador of modification. In his thinking, a body encompasses a

technological, cerebral capacity for transformation rather than only a realm of organic nature with equilibrium. Thus, the existence of bodies does not destabilize some material or immaterial importance of an artifact. Only some interactive works of symbolizing functions give evidence. They are studying works of action via some medial progressions fixed to some bodies functioning in the stories: as disseminating something they are not themselves, as fictitious characters, part of, unfolding awareness without itself offering knowledge. This writing process opens greater possibilities for conveying these creations in poetics. An enchanting work between some clashing stakes of immaterialism plus physical reductionism, these writers delivered an earlier form of inimitable poetics of materialism. To recreate an omnipotent experience, for example, embodied in *Paradise Lost*, Milton incorporated some creationist method of God—to create some material from the immaterial. In that dearth, historical memory, and contemporary time matter in some influence of such an endeavor.

Therefore, by placing some lyrics in some context of Whitman's being and times, this examination shows Whitman's well-crafted understanding of multi-racial-being with the presence or some negated existence in multi-cultural equality. "Poetry," Whitman wrote, "is the language of universal sentiment... Her voice is the voice of Eternity dwelling all great souls. Her aims are the inducements of heaven, her triumphs the survival of the Beautiful, the True, and the Good" (*Rape of Florida* 4). This "voice of Eternity" is transcendent, permeating minds throughout time. The universality of verse coils around delusion and imposed ways of being and uproots "Truth" from some lingering fibers of misappropriation. His work was formulated when Blackness as a race within being-as-statelessness ousted Black yearnings for equality. Language is some most evident and pervasive of the colonial traces, primarily in countries over which the British Empire held influence. This notion becomes visible when one assesses some evidence that many postcolonial writings exist in English. This language "provides the terms by which reality may be constituted" with "the names by which the world may be 'known'" so some effects of language in a colonized nation transcend the essential purpose of speech as transmission and develop more cultural importance (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 283). Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o also implies this when he claims, "Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 290).¹⁹

Materialism infers the challenge of reinterpreting being on the rationale of the turn in the sciences. Although materialism in its respective manifestations, whether ancient or naturalistic, goes back to a material principle, materialism attempts to give some being to material-less sensibilities. This challenge implies a denial of the hylemorphic techniques of Aristotelian metaphysics, which indicate that something is underlying matter, namely raw material (hylé). This can be informed by the notions from which the form arises. Even phenomenology, which has generated vast criticisms against substantialism, makes use of hylé as a source to something underlying.

In ending, I refer to the literary Historian Parrington's description of the Great Barbecue of the 1870s that Whitman aestheticized:

Suspicious commoners with better eyes than manners discovered the favoritism of the waiters and drew attention to the difference between their own meager helpings and the heaped-up plates of more favored guests. It appeared indeed that there was gross discrimination in the service [...] Then at last came the reckoning. When the bill was

sent into the American people the farmers discovered that they had been put off with the giblets while the capitalists were consuming the turkey. They learned that they were no match at a barbecue for more voracious guests, and as they went home unsatisfied, a sullen anger burned in their hearts that was to express itself later in fierce agrarian revolts (Parrington 23-24)²⁰

Vernon Parrington's uneasiness has come to be the concern of most people today. The Second Great Barbecue will form the present culture for years to come. If this epoch generates more social disparity, the resentment and fury of the uninvited guests may be livid. The pillaging of the sacred land persists mostly by white people exclusively who continue to revive the necromantic spirit cult of colored sacrilege on massive historical gravesite every day. Albery Whitman aestheticized this lack of invitation to the barbecue and desecration. Moten, Gumbs, and Ife continue this sort of work in inspiring a poetic reformation of sorts to this phenomenon. In a cultural matrix of configuration, poets blend ethics with materialism to demonstrate highly complex interconnectedness in ways of being. Not only was Albery Whitman tying varying communities of dispossession with other sacred rituals, but he also illustrated often a spiritual bond with nature and reverence of atmosphere around him, of trees, of God, of Earth. In doing so, he paved a different path for artistry in the wake of oppression to find immaterial means of engaging with the ancient and current dilemmas of being.

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Notes

¹ "Whitman, Albery Allson 5/30/1851–6/29/1901." *Encyclopedia of African-American Writing*, edited by Shari Dorantes Hatch, Grey House Publishing, 3rd edition, 2018. *Credo Reference*.

² "Whitman, Albery A.," *Notable Kentucky African Americans Database*, accessed December 20, 2020, <https://nkaa.uky.edu/nkaa/items/show/1035>.

³ See Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Fugitive Slave Law" (1854).

⁴ Luker, Ralph E. "Ransom, Reverdy Cassius." Oxford African American Studies Center. May 31, 2013. Oxford University Press; Davis, LaRose M. "Whitman, Albery Allson" Oxford African American Studies Center. May 31, 2013. Oxford University Press.

⁵ The epoch of federal giveaways to industrial capitalism was first described as "the Great Barbecue" by Vernon Parrington in the uncompleted final volume of *Main Currents in American Thought*. See Vernon L. Parrington, *Beginnings of Critical Realism in America: 1860-1920*, at 23-26 (1958).

⁶ "A New City Hall Council Bluffs Sadly in Need of a New Municipal Headquarters." *Omaha Daily Herald*, vol. XXIII, no. 315, August 13, 1888, p. 5. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.

⁷ Culp, Daniel. W. *Twentieth Century Negro Literature*. New York: Arno, 1969.

⁸ See Jimoh, Yemisi, Hamlin, Francoise. *These Truly are the Brave: An Anthology of African American Writings on War and Citizenship*. University Press of Florida, 2015 pp. 175.

- ⁹ Captured from Indians in Florida: Letter from the Secretary of War, House Documents, 25 Congress, 3 Session, No. 225 (Serial 348), 119-20, 57-65; American State Papers, Military Affairs.
- ¹⁰ Court of Inquiry-Operations in Florida: Letter from the Secretary of War, House Documents, 25 Congress, 2 Session, No. 78 (Serial 323), 52; American State Papers, Military Affairs (7 vols., Washington, 1832-1861), VII, 820-21.
- ¹¹ Matt Sandler, *The Black Romantic Revolution: Abolitionist Poets at the End of Slavery*, Verso Books, 2020.
- ¹² See Fred Moten, "Fugitivity is immanent to the thing but is manifest transversally" from *hughson's tavern* (2008).
- ¹³ Mowat, Barbara A., and Paul Werstine. *Shakespeare's Sonnets and Poems*. New York: Washington Square, 2006, 2004.
- ¹⁴ See "Obscene Textures: The Erotics of Disgust in the Writings of Ismat Chughtai" (2020) in the journal *Comparative Literature* by Neetu Khanna as she explores how the female body becomes the focal object of violent subjection by both colonial and anticolonial nationalist regimes of discipline.
- ¹⁵ Sherman, Joan R. "Whitman, Albery Allson." *Oxford African American Studies Center*. December 01, 2006. Oxford University Press.
- ¹⁶ Jones, Madison, "Sylvan Rhetorics: Roots and Branches of More-than-Human Publics, *Rhetoric Review*, 38: 1, 63-78, 2019.
- ¹⁷ Spenser has said, as quoted from *The Works of Edmund Spenser in Six Volumes with a Glossary Explaining the Old and Obscure Words* written by Jacob Tonson in 1715, "In vain he feeketh others to fupprefes who hath not learn'd himself first to fubdue..." (In vain a man seeks others to suppress who has not learned himself first to subdue) (Tonson 872). The latter words are ironic seeing he spent most of his life oppressing the Irish and Catholic people. Whitman's choice of the Spenserian stanza is ironic, given the Elizabethan poet's beliefs towards colonialism. Spenser made his fortune in Ireland, and he greatly supported the growing plantation system there, an indication of England's pattern of settlement in its American colonies. In 1596 Spenser wrote *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, which called not only for more British settlement but for the use of starvation as a way of controlling Ireland's native Celtic population.
- ¹⁸ See Michel Foucault. "Psychiatric Power." In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: The New Press, pp. 39-50. 1994. *Psychiatric Power* is based on the edited transcripts of a series of lectures Foucault gave at the *College de France* in the winter of 1973-1974.
- ¹⁹ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, "The Language of African Literature," *Post-colonial Studies Reader*, p. 290.
- ²⁰ Parrington, *supra* note 5, at 23-24.

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Ritual Subversions in Medieval Kerala: Reading N.S. Madhavan's "Pulapedi" as a Cultural Text

RENJINI RAMANKUTTY

In this power struggle of dominance, the subject resists and opposes a homogenous social standing that seeks to unify all individuals into a governed position.

(Fuery, Patrick and Kelli Fuery 4-5)

This examination reveals a set of cultural practices and rituals in Medieval Kerala that allowed the lower castes to dominate the upper castes temporarily. The socio-cultural practice of Pulapedi, Mannapedi, and Parayapedi allows the men from low caste communities such as Pulayans, Mannans, and Parayans, the right to abduct upper-caste women during a particular period of the year. Hence the upper caste women were ritually prohibited from going out in public since if they happened to be caught, they were immediately declared outcastes. During this time, upper-caste men too refused to be in public since they were temporarily "castrated." This researcher came to know about these practices through a reference to this custom in Dharmaraja, the Malayalam reader for standard X. In due course, as I began to explore more into the origin and evolution of the caste system in Kerala, a whole paradigm of ritual subversion of caste hierarchy came under analysis. However, these socio-cultural practices were neither mentioned nor discussed in detail in the academic discourse on Kerala historiography. The grand discourse of the history of Kerala constructs such social customs as Pulapedi, Mannapedi, and Parayapedi to signify the absence of modernity. In popular memory and academic discussions, the abolition of Pulapedi is an essential landmark in the history of modernity in Kerala, symbolizing cultural renaissance. Against this socio-cultural background, this paper reads a short story, "Pulapedi," authored by N.S. Madhavan, a famous writer in Malayalam as a cultural text on the ritual subversions of caste hierarchy in Kerala. The examination engages with the theories of Michel Foucault and Mikhail Bakhtin to explore the operations of power via subjectivity and knowledge formation in Kerala. In this way, the (im)materiality of power and subjectivity is revealed.

Historical knowledge plays a pivotal role in the process of identity formation and the consciousness that arrives out of it. Modern nation-states deploy elaborate mechanisms to construct such histories and circulate them in the form of discourses. Interpreted herein are the rituals and practices in Medieval Kerala in the context of Kerala modernity as part of the mechanisms employed by the state to keep the low caste communities under constant surveillance. The Dalit community in Kerala, subjected to slavery to the early nineteenth century, attempted to write their histories through reformers like Poykayil Yohannan. Sanal Mohan. P's work *Modernity of Slavery* presents a micro-history of the emancipation of the Pulaya community through the agency of PRDS.¹ What follows is a historicist reading of an early ritual, recognized as part of folklore, to examine the

construction of modernity in Kerala. In this way, translatability becomes philosophical and grants access to remote antiquity. Benjamin Botkin defined folklore as:

[A] body of traditional belief, custom, and expression handed down mainly by word of mouth and circulating chiefly outside of commercial and academic means of communication and instruction. Every group bound together by common interests or purposes, whether educated or uneducated, rural or urban possesses a body of traditions called its folklore. Into these traditions, enter many elements, individual, famous, or even “literary.” However, all are absorbed and assimilated through repetition and variation into a pattern that has value and continuity for the group as a whole. (cited in Sims, C. Martha & Martine Stephens 10)

Historical references to the custom of Pulapedī and other similar practices are scanty. Samuel Mateer’s ethnographic study *Native Life in Travancore* presents a detailed analysis of the different socio-cultural practices and rituals in the Travancore region in eighteenth-century Kerala. In North Travancore, Parayans designated as thieves in the traditional caste hierarchy forced themselves into upper-caste homes and abducted women and children. According to the custom of Mannapedī, Mannans, considered earlier as untouchables, had the right to abduct and molest upper-caste Namboodiri and Nair women. Pulapedī was prohibited in Travancore during the reign of Unny Kerala Varma in 1695 AD and Malabar during British rule (Gangadharan T.K., 197). According to Mateer, Pulapedī was practiced during the months of Kumbam and Meenam. In these months, a Sudra woman, unescorted by a Shannar boy, happening to meet a Pulaya man, can be abducted. According to Mateer, “A lower caste man would try his utmost to stone and hit an upper-caste woman after sun-set. If the stone hits the woman, she loses her caste” (376). Mateer also elaborates on Parayapedī, as the custom was called in North Travancore:

[During February], after the harvest, Parayans forcibly let themselves into Brahmin and Sudra homes, abduct women and children, and dacoit them. They would justify their acts declaring themselves a category among Brahmins, who were declared outcastes after their adversaries (who remain unnamed) fed them beef meat (considered taboo food by Brahmins) through treachery. (376)

According to Herman Gundert, Mannapedī operated during the month of Karkkitaka, considered inauspicious for Hindus in Kerala. Mannapedī means fear of Mannans. Several restrictions and taboos were placed upon the upper castes during these periods (cited in Mateer 375). The month of Karkkitaka remains untoward for caste Hindus even now. No Hindu marriages are conducted during this month. The fear surrounding Karkkitaka might carry an archetypal fear for the lower castes’ temporary gain of power. According to Barabosa’s description (A.D. 1516) on Pulaya customs, Pulayans frequented upper-caste Nair homes at night during these periods. Upper castes took utmost precautions to avoid them. If the Pulayas “defile” any woman by touch, she had to confess her defilement by wailing out loudly, even though the act had no witness. She was supposed to leave her ancestral home as soon as the act was committed, not to cause further damage to the purity of her clan. She would often seek refuge in some lower caste dwelling to escape the wrath of her clan. She could even be sold to [Black people], other mixed castes, Muslims or Christians (Mateer 376-77).

The erasure of Dalit folklore from the modern historiography of Kerala is an instance of epistemological violence- a part of the disciplinary mechanism employed by the state to monitor the subjects. The concept of constant surveillance or panopticon by Foucault

elaborates on the ways through which power operates in society: “that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it” (6). Here Dalit folklore in the form of rituals and cultural practices is recognized by the power wielders- the state—as one capable of disrupting the traditional hierarchies of caste and gender; the power of the Dalit man over the upper-caste woman. The ritual of Mannapedi is framed in *Dharmaraja*, a central literary text which circulated and consolidated Nair hegemony in the nineteenth century Malayali society as an object of ridicule. The author of the novel, Sir. C.V. Raman Pillai was one of the Malayali Memorial, ² which demanded the appointment of native Nairs in higher government posts.

Kesava Pillai, the central protagonist in *Dharmaraja*, is loosely based on the historical figure of Raja Kesava Das, the Diwan under Karthika Thirunal Rama Varma, who ruled Travancore from 1758-1798. Sir.C. V. Raman Pillai projects Kesava Pillai as an efficient, handsome, and young court official of humble origins. Though he belongs to a decadent Nair family, other characters in the novel are not sure of Kesava Pillai’s caste origins. On account of his inferior birth, he is constantly derailed by his co-workers. Ummini Pillai, a co-worker, abuses him when he misunderstands that Meenakshi, his love interest, has been abducted by Kesava Pillai:

The womanizing official is caught. Haven’t heard of mannapedi in the city, in broad daylight, and after the tenth sunrise before. How dare you cross your limits? Let the King hear of all this. Where is the lass? Men, her owners have come. You will answer. The low caste bastard! (112)

The process through which modernity was circulated in the nineteenth century Kerala was through caste (Jayakumar, K.P. “Mandal Commission” 34). A ritual that allowed a temporary reversal of power is ridiculed in a text which supports traditional caste hierarchy. The same ritual is invoked in another literary text to subvert the dominant power structures. The maintenance of caste purity and strict abhorrence of caste pollution was a predominant feature of traditional Kerala society. Practices such as Pulapedi, Mannapedi, and Parayapedi and rituals such as Ochira Thallu, subverted the caste hierarchy temporarily and constituted an alternative symbolic order of ritual subversion.

In Sreedhara Menon A’s opinion, a reputed historiographer of Kerala, the caste system was neither strict nor rigid in the Dravidian Vanchi epoch (1-500 A.D.) in Kerala. People were divided into different classes based on their professions, but inter-class marriages were quite common (24). In the opinion of Gangadharan, another historiographer of modern Kerala, Knowledge was freely circulated, and merit was acknowledged irrespective of one’s social and economic status in ancient Kerala. Literary and other writings of the Sangam period, such as *Tholkappiyam*, have left valuable accounts on the cultural, economic, social, and political aspects of the kingdoms of the south (78). The political institution was a monarchy with a patrilineal system of succession and inheritance. The matrilineal system was non-existent though the Chera Kings used the names of both the parents along with their names. Gangadharan suggests in his study on the evolution of Kerala history and culture that communities like Panars (bards), Kuravas, Parayas, and Vedas (hunters) were held in honor by kings and were equals or even superior to the Brahmins.

There was no ritual prohibition against eating beef, meat, and fish. According to *Tholkappiyam*, Anthanars, Arachars (hangmen), Vanikkars (traders) and, ‘Uzhavas’

belonged to higher classes. Pulavar, Parayar, Panar, Porunar also had a higher position in society (79). Pulam in old Malayalam meant to land, and pulavars were the owners of the land and scholars. Pulavars meant those who sustain. All other categories, such as Vinychers (laborers), belonged to the lower classes. Anthanars were educated scholars selected from the society irrespective of their clan or class. They had the right to conduct *velvi*, a ritual of animal sacrifice to appease gods, followed by a feast of toddy and meat. There were Ezhava scholars in Sanskrit and medicine. Itty Achuthan, who had compiled the compendium on medicinal plants, *Horthuse Malabaricus*, is believed to be an Ezhava (Gangadharan 220).

The caste system was injected into a more or less egalitarian Kerala society with the arrival of the Aryan Brahmins in 300 B.C. immediately after the arrival of Buddhist and Jain monks. With the decline of Buddhism and Jainism, around the seventh and eighth centuries, the Namboothiri's attained more political power. They even replaced king Pallivanperumal for his support to Buddhists (Gopalakrishnan, P.K 254). William Logan in *Malabar Manual* argues that the concept of caste was imported to Kerala through tracing the etymology of the word caste. There is no indigenous word in any of the Dravidian languages, including Malayalam, to signify caste. The root of the word "jati" is the Sanskrit word "Jan," meaning birth, and Jati connotes customs associated with birth (110). Commenting on the rigidity of caste practices in eighteenth-century Kerala, Mateer suggests that the Nambuthiris treated anyone who was not a Nambuthiri as an untouchable. Keen to guard their superiority in the political front, the Nambuthiris were scrupulous in the advocacy of the caste system maintained through ritual upgrading, ritual defilement, and endogamy (370).

The Nambuthiris formed pacts with the natives entrusting certain functions to specific classes. Accordingly, the caste known as Tiyyars or Ezhavas were entrusted with the duty of planting the wastelands. They were given privileges such as The Footrope Right and The Ladder Right for mounting trees. The Nairs, so-called after the Sanskrit word *Nayak*, signifying leader, in the honorific plural "lord" and soldier in the ordinary sense, were deemed the protectors with numerous branches (Logan 110). The Brahmins were unwilling to raise the aboriginal ruling races like the Pulayans to the dignity of the pure Kshatriya caste of Aryans.

Nevertheless, the state organization required that there should be a class to be constituted as protectors but treated as Sudras or the servile castes. In this manner, the real agriculturists except for the Vellalars (irrigators), out of whom the caste of Nairs seems to have been formed initially, came to be treated as untouchables (Logan 116). According to K. Sivasankaran Nair, the Nair community is first mentioned in the eleventh-century documents such as *Thirunelli Shasanam* (A.D.1021) and *Thrikkadithanam Shasanam*. *Thirunelli Shasanam* mentions the Nair as the manager and the chief marshal, while the latter mentions him as the landlord. This notion suggests that the Nairs, who were one of the lower castes, were ritually upgraded to perform the function of protection (36). The ordinary language prescribed for the Nairs to address their superiors in the caste hierarchy indicates their sudra status. A Nair speaking to a Nambutiri must not call his food rice, but kallari (stony or gritty rice), his money, chempukashu (copper cash), and his home, kuppamadam (shack) (Logan 127). According to Logan, the influence of the Nambutiris seems to have been supreme in the state councils, as their caste names imply. Gundert has suggested that the term Nambutiri might have derived from the Dravidian verb

“nambuka,” meaning to confide or to desire, and “tiri,” a corrupt form of the common Sankrit affix, “Shri,” meaning office or dignity (Logan 119).

B. Rajeevan, a cultural historian of Kerala, has conducted exclusive caste formation in Medieval Kerala. He suggests that various tribal societies in pre-Aryan India were accommodated and absorbed into the plow agricultural village system of the Aryan tribes formed in the north Gangetic plains. Commenting on the discrepancy between the theoretical and forms of the varna –jati chaturvarnya systems in Kerala, he suggests:

the observance of certain distances to avoid pollution among the upper castes and lower castes, the joint family and customs of Kerala Brahmans which separate them from their counterparts elsewhere, the matriarchal joint family and succession among the castes included in the varna-jati system, and above all the peculiarities of the feudal land-relations in Kerala, it is evident from all these realities that the formation of the agricultural village system in Kerala took shape in a different situation from that of the south and the north (7).

The Pulayas, Mannans, and Parayas, were some of the castes who were ritually defiled during the consolidation of caste hierarchy. As mentioned earlier, the Pulavas who sustained the land were re-designated as “Pulayans, the polluted” as the term “pula” (pela in corrupt form) in Malayalam bears connotations of ceremonial pollution caused by touching a dead body. Paradoxically, the grains touched by the Pulayans are not considered polluted but used by the Brahmins and nobles, offered in temples, and carried into the most exclusive kitchens (Mateer 78). Travel writing by Mateer, colonial surveys by Edgar Thurston, and most significantly, the Scheduled Castes, compiled by Kumar Suresh Singh, under the auspices of the Anthropological Survey of India, mentions the Pulayans as polluted. A lost history of Pulayan supremacy emerges when one goes through folk histories. Thurston mentions that Aikkara Yajaman (The Lord of Aikkara), whose ancestors were Pulayan kings, was held in considerable respect by the Pulayans of North Travancore (Mateer 71). Mateer mentions another fragment in this lost history; the Pulayans in the neighborhood of Trivandrum talk about a Pulayan chieftain who had resided in a fort at Pulayanarkotta, literally meaning the Pulayan’s fort. A family in the neighborhood claim themselves the descendants of the Pulayan king’s accountants (71). In the case of Pulayans, it is clear that the native rulers were degraded when their traditional knowledge of agricultural practices was subjugated to the Vedic discourses. The Pulayans were interpellated into this ritual defilement through stories circulated among them of their origin. Mateer quotes an unknown Pulayan:

We are content to remain in present circumstances for Bhagwan (God), after having created the higher castes, considered what to do with the surplus earth, when Parvathi advised him to create [in addition to that] a low class to serve the higher ones. (69)

Another popular belief held by the Pulayans of Kanjirappalli is associated with the Parasurama myth. When Parasuraman had murdered the 21 generations of Kshathriya kings, their widows besought Parasurama to supply men to substitute their husbands. He called strangers to husband the widows from whose union the Pulayans were born (Mateer 70).

Mannans functioned as washermen in the caste hierarchy. It was the duty of the Mannans to give mattu (washed white cloth) to Nambutiris; lower Brahmins called Antaralajathis, Nairs, and Ezhavas before going to bath on the day which they are free from pollution. They refused to do this service to Kammalans for uncertain reasons. However, one can surmise that probably the Kammalans, counted as one of the polluting

castes, were considered by Mannans as a caste lower to theirs. Veluthedathu Nairs, whose duty was the same, restricted their services to Nairs. Since washing was considered a polluting act, Mannans, Veluthedathu Nairs, and other communities that functioned as washermen were considered polluted; ironically, it was the same washing that kept the upper castes free of pollution. They were not polluting since they had the right to wash and to wear washed clothes. Castes like Pulayans, Nayadis, and other tribal communities were denied the right to wash and the service of washermen. Hence washing was one act that legitimated one's entry to the upper castes (Singh 910-11).

The Nambuthiris ensured caste purity by allowing only the oldest son to marry within the caste but outside his own family and Gothra. Only when the eldest brother had no male progeny were the junior members allowed to marry the preferably the sister of his elder brother's wife. The younger Nambuthiri men followed the custom of sambandham, relationships with Nair women. The children of this union belonged to the mother's family, and descent was reckoned in the female line (Logan 153). Even the mere sight of the Pulaya or Nayadi was enough to make the Nambuthiri consider him polluted. The prescribed ritual distance for some of the castes as codified by Logan (118) consist of: Mukkuvan—24ft, Kanisan—36ft, Pulayas—64ft, and Nayadi—72ft. The Shudra women, especially Pulayas and Channars, did not have the right to cover the upper part of the body. The Sudra women were the sexual property of the upper castes. Mateer observes:

such classes were required to be uncovered above the waist; shoes, umbrellas, [refined] cloths, and the costly ornaments were interdicted for them. The holding of an umbrella was prohibited for all castes except Brahmins on the public occasion, though the rains were pouring upon them. The lower cast females were not allowed to cover the top part of their body. (70-71)

It is possible to conclude from the above discussion that fear of loss of caste purity was of utmost concern in the social milieu of Kerala. In the opinion of B.Rajeevan, a seminal feature of the caste system in Kerala is the observance of the forms of untouchability prevalent among all low castes, including the lowest ones. The caste of Nayadi, considered the lowest in the caste hierarchy, condemned to keep the farthest distance from the Namboodiri Brahmins observe untouchability from the Pulayas, "For the Nayadi, the food polluted by a Pulaya or Paraya is forbidden, but the Pulaya and Paraya are castes mutually polluting by touch and have to themselves purified through a bathing by immersion" (7-8). The origin and evolution of the caste system in Kerala are deeply rooted in the concepts of purity and pollution. Each of the pre-Aryan tribe which had been accommodated into a model of Aryan class society was mutually excluding itself in the name of tribal purity. These tribes might have been deployed in the division of labor of the agricultural village system and their mutually excluding purity concepts.

The concept of caste purity was so crucial that non-Kshatriya rulers of ancient days used to sacrifice Hiranyagarbha to confer Kshatriyahood on themselves. Hiranyagarbha, literally meaning the golden womb/egg, was one of the ritual practices conducted by the Travancore royal family. Mateer gives a minute description of the practice:

An enormous gold container is filled with holy water and panchagavya (made from five substances obtained from the cow, milk, curd, ghee, cow's urine, and dung). The king enters the pot while the Brahmin priests chant mantras. The king is made to wear the crown when he emerges from the pot. After the ritual, the gold container is broken and distributed among Brahmins (486).

Mateer has demonstrated that the ritual of Hiranyagarbha enables a Sudra king to occupy the higher strata of caste ((189). Furthermore, Mateer elaborates on another ritual observed by the Travancore royal family during the Navaratri celebrations to maintain caste purity. The idol of the deity Kumaraswamy is brought in a procession from Padmanabhapuram Palace to the temple at Thiruvananthapuram. Kumaraswamy, another form of Lord Murugan, is supposed to have lost his caste as his wives belonged to Kurava and Paraya castes. Hence his idol is prohibited from entering the Padmanabhaswamy Temple at Thiruvananthapuram. The fear of pollution goes to the extent that Kuravas and Parayas were scared out of the main streets during the festival in the heydays of the royal family (192-93).

It may be seen from the above discussions that the maintenance of caste purity and fear of caste pollution was of utmost significance in Kerala till the nineteenth century, from the upper caste Brahmins to the lowermost Nayadis. The temporary domination of the lower castes as seen in the rituals or cultural practices of Pulapedi, Parayapedi, and Mannapedi becomes highly significant when analyzed against the discourses of caste hierarchy, caste pollution, and similar practices of caste subversion.

Considering the ritual subversion of caste hierarchy in Medieval Kerala as an alternative symbolic order, Pulapedi, Mannapedi, and Parayapedi constitute only one among the practices which involved a ritualistic subversion of caste hierarchy. There were other rites and rituals, such as Ochira Thallu, which subverted the caste hierarchy. However, Pulapedi, Mannapedi, and Parayapedi occupy a special significance among these rites because no other custom attributes to the untouchables access to upper-caste women. Special privileges were granted to servile castes in various parts of Kerala during festivals such as Ochira Thallu. During the Ochira Thallu, Pulayans and other lower castes are permitted to participate in the sham fight. They give and receive blows equally with the nairs. The Ochira Thallu is conducted as part of the annual festival celebrated at the Ochchira Parabrahma temple. According to Mateer, during the Ochira Thallu, lower-caste men had the right to abduct upper-caste women and keep them in custody (97).

According to Captain Colin Mackenzie, the Holiers, one of the outcastes in Coorg and Canara, once held the dominant place in the village before the arrival of Aryans. The Holiers are identical to the Pulayans in Kerala. Holiers are supposed to be the first settlers in Karnataka. A Holier functions as the priest to the village goddess and can make the first offering in the annual festivals. The Brahmin priests can offer their worship only after the Holier. At Maillkota and Bailur, Holiers have the right of entering the temple on three days in the year especially set apart for them. A Holier also acts as the Kulawadi or the village Henchman. All such practices could be seen as vestiges of a higher position in former times when they were the masters of the land. One of the death rituals in the region is the symbolic transaction of land between the Kulawadi and relatives of the dead for a nominal fee. They buy land for the dead from the original sons of the soil (Mateer 96-97)

The significance of such privileges cannot be undermined as an occasional excuse for relaxation from painful toil or as bribes to keep the oppressed submissive, as suggested by Mateer (97). They are somewhat symbolic acts that reverse the caste hierarchy for a short period. These customs are significant for two reasons. The first reason, as mentioned earlier, is the availability of upper-caste women for lower-caste men. The upper caste fear for the lower castes, as seen in the customs of Pulapedi, Mannapedi, and Parayapedi, is socially sanctioned. No lower caste man could be penalized if charged with molesting an

upper-caste woman as part of the ritual. However, the woman could be subjected to physical chastisement, honor killing, or other forms of punishment. Mateer also suggests that the custom might have had its origins in the severe marriage laws practiced in the Nambuthiri community, due to which there were several unmarried women (376). Mateer also elaborates on the punishment given to the erring women:

If any woman of Nayar family should offend against the law of her sect, and the king know[s] of it before her relations and brothers, he commands her to be taken out and sold out of the kingdom to Moors or Christians, and if her male relations or her sons know, of it first, they shut her up and kill her with dagger or spear wounds, saying that if they did not do so, they would remain greatly dishonored (377).

The punishment meted out to women in the name of caste pollution, and ritual purity was so severe that “a Brahman woman erring with a low-caste man became the Rajah’s slave” (Mateer 377) and “a low-caste woman allowing improper intimacy with a Brahman was sold to the Mohammadans” (ibid). This form of punishment given to upper-caste women was expected, and the remnants of the law could be found in the Malayalam expression, “Thura Kayattuka,” which could be roughly translated as “transportation beyond the seas” (Mateer 377). Mateer also suggests that “this ostracism was reserved for female criminals, on whom the punishment of death is never inflicted” (377). The erstwhile historian of Travancore, Vaikathu Pachu Moothathu,³ describes one such incident in history “when the women of the Eight Knights (Ettuveetil Pillaimar) ⁴ who were extirpated in M.E. 908, were handed over to fishermen” (Mateer 377).

Parallels could be found with such rituals in Medieval Kerala and the Marxist-Formalist Bakhtin’s concept of Carnavalesque, derived from the practice of medieval carnival when, in an episode of a permitted license, masses would lampoon the authorities of church and the state. These practices provided an outlet for the lower castes’ repressed feelings of fear and rage. A major theoretician of popular culture, Bakhtin (1895-1975), analyzed the subversive potential of carnivalesque. The carnivals in medieval Europe permitted the masses to enjoy a holiday from their labors. The people would, in the process, lampoon the authorities of church and the state, unleashing a world of topsy-turvy where all is mixed, hybrid, ritually degraded, and defiled. In the opinion of John Storey, it used the material body and its normal functions to celebrate human life as an “unfinished becoming,” thereby articulating a world view opposite to the official totalitarian regime (251). Thus such rituals constitute an “alternative symbolic order” (Mohan, 281), subverting traditional hierarchies and power structures.

When reading N.S. Madhavan’s “Pulapedi” as a cultural text, it is important to note that “Pulapedi” is the title of a short story written by N.S. Madhavan and forms part of a compilation of stories called Paryaya Kathakal. The protagonist of the story, Savitri, is a palimpsest on nineteenth-century nationalist literature, representing the Brahmin widow as the figure of reform. The renaissance discourse in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries focused on the Brahmin widow as the representative of the oppressive social conditions in traditional Indian society. The nationalist reformist discourse positioned the suffering Brahmin widow as the symbol of transformations in Indian society (Tharu, Susie 150).

Savitri, the protagonist of “Pulapedi,” subverts this nationalist doctrine of reform by choosing to live with a man outside her community. She openly discards the cultural scripts of gender and sexuality the society forces on her by choosing to live with Chathan,

a Pulaya man. The illam (traditional Nambuthiri house) is a trope of oppression in the story. The west zenana for menstruating women in the illam had no windows. She had to resort to the nadumuttom (open space in the center of a traditional Nambuthiri house) to be aware of days and nights. She senses mornings and evenings through the voices of the Pulaya laborers in the courtyard. Even a patch of sunlight or a whiff of fresh air is denied to her. Savitri's body is another metaphor of her oppression which she uses to resist the traditional hierarchies of gender and caste. On her husband's shraddha day, Savitri is filled with thoughts of her own body and her forbidden sexuality. Savitri is more preoccupied with her own body rather than the memories of her late husband, Vasudevan. Savitri is thrown out of the illam when she resists Parameswaran's, the younger brother of her husband, attempts of seduction. On her way to the river, Savitri finds Chathan, a Pulaya slave in the illam, whom she asks to accompany her. Here Savitri rejects the notions of caste purity by floating her ghosha (a white cloth used by Nambuthiri women to cover the upper part of the body) and palm leaf umbrella (a traditional symbol of Brahmin superiority) in the river. Then for the first time in her life, she opens her eyes to the world outside the premises of the illam and howls with Chathan. Savitri's resilient attitude to life and subversion of an age-old social practice shines through her act of assuming the new identity of a Pulaya woman. The prologue to the story, the lines from *Devi Bhagavatham*, "Ya Devi Sarvabhooteshu Mukthi Roopena Samsthitha," sets the story's theme as the attainment of liberation. The line offers a salute to the goddess who sustains life in the form of liberation.

In ending, the discourse offered was an excavation and exploration of some cultural practices in Medieval Kerala which form part of Dalit folklore to discuss how these alternative symbolic orders were erased from the modern historiography of Kerala. The deep-rooted fear of caste pollution in Medieval Kerala observed caste rules quite strict. However, masses were permitted relaxation from caste rules on certain occasions and festivities. The socio-cultural practices discussed in the paper probably constituted one such realm of carnivalesque. The discursive formation of modernity, subjectivity, and epistemology in nineteenth-century Kerala enabled a complete erasure of such practices. The policy of strict surveillance employed by the modern state machinery constituted these practices as the absence of modernity. While the nineteenth-century text, *Dharmaraja* followed the rationale of the modern nation-state in citing Mannapedi as an object of ridicule, "Pulapedi" by N.S. Madhavan subverts the reformist logic of the nationalist doctrine by raising Savitri, a Brahmin widow, to an agent, by choosing to speak for herself.

The immateriality of this discourse provided an opportunity to enquire more into the debate of sublimity in bodily and spiritual manners that permeates caste systems in Kerala. The maintenance of caste purity was of utmost concern in Medieval Kerala that it affected administrative practices, law and legal practices, revenue and tax system, religion and language, to name a few. Hence the need for more research in the field arises, demanding an interdisciplinary approach combining Anthropology, Social Sciences, and Cultural Studies.

Notes

1. PRDS or Prathyaksha Raksha Daiva Sabha was formed in 1910 by Poykayil Yohannan, who mobilized the Parayas, Pulayas, and similar Dalit communities to establish an independent religion of their own. This new religion combined ideas of salvation and spiritual progress along with notions of social and economic development. For more details, see Mohan 152-213.
2. Malayali Memorial is a mass petition submitted to the Maharaja of Travancore in 1891, demanding the appointment of the educated natives in the higher grades of public service. For more details see Menon, A. Sreedhara Chapter XXVII- Political Movements in Travancore and Cochin.
3. Vaikathu Pachu Moothathu alias Vaikathu Parameswara Sivadvija was a versatile scholar of the erstwhile princely state of Travancore. He wrote Thiruvithamcore Charitram narrating the legends and facts of the Travancore dynasty up to Maharaja Ayilyam Thirunal. For more details see Menon, T. Shankunni 120-140.
4. The Eight Lords or the Ettuveetil Pillaimar were a group of powerful nobles in the Thripadappu Swaroopam. Travancore, Anizham Thirunal Marthanda Varma, defeated these lords and killed them, charging treason against the state in 1730. For more details see Menon, T. Shankunni 120-140.

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JOURNALS RECEIVED

British Journal of Aesthetics, Comparative Literature, New Literary History, Poetics Today, Philosophy and Literature, Critical Inquiry, Journal of Modern Literature, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism

The *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* (ISSN 0252-8169) is a quarterly peer-reviewed academic journal published by Vishvanatha Kaviraja Institute, India since 1977. (Vishvanatha Kaviraja, most widely known for his masterpiece in aesthetics, *Sabityadarpana* or the “Mirror of Composition”, was a prolific 14th-century Indian poet, scholar, and rhetorician.) The Institute was founded by Prof. Ananta Charan Sukla (1942-2020) on 22 August 1977, coinciding with the birth centenary of renowned philosopher, aesthetician, and art historian, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), to promote interdisciplinary studies and research in comparative literature, cultural theory, aesthetics, philosophy and criticism of the arts, art history, and history of ideas. He edited and published the journal for over 40 years as the founding editor.

The journal is committed to comparative and cross-cultural issues in literary understanding and interpretation, aesthetic theories, and conceptual analysis of art. It also publishes special issues on critical theories of current interest and contemporary relevance. It is the oldest academic journal of India still in existence sans any institutional support. It has published the finest of essays by authors of global renown like René Wellek, Harold Osborne, John Hospers, John Fisher, Murray Krieger, Martin Bucco, Remo Ceserani, J B Vickery, Menachem Brinker, Milton Snoeyenbos, Mary Wiseman, Ronald Roblin, T R Martland, S C Sengupta, K R S Iyengar, V K Chari, Suresh Raval, S K Saxena, Gordon Epperson, Judith Lochhead, Charles Altieri, Martin Jay, Jonathan Culler, Richard Shusterman, Robert Kraut, T J Diffey, T R Quigley, R B Palmer, Keith Keating, and others. Some of these celebrated essays have been published by Routledge in book format. The journal is indexed and abstracted in the MLA International Bibliography, Master List of Periodicals (USA), Ulrich's Directory of Periodicals, ERIH PLUS, The Philosopher's Index, WorldCat Directory, PhilPapers, EBSCO, ProQuest, Literature Online, Gale (Cengage), ACLA, Academic Resource Index, United States Library of Congress, and the British Library. It is also indexed in numerous university (central) libraries, state and public libraries, and scholarly organizations/learned societies databases. Celebrated scholars of the time like René Wellek, Harold Osborne, Mircea Eliade, Monroe Beardsley, John Hospers, John Fisher, M H Abrams, John Boulton, S K Saxena and many Indian and Western scholars had been members of its Editorial Board.

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